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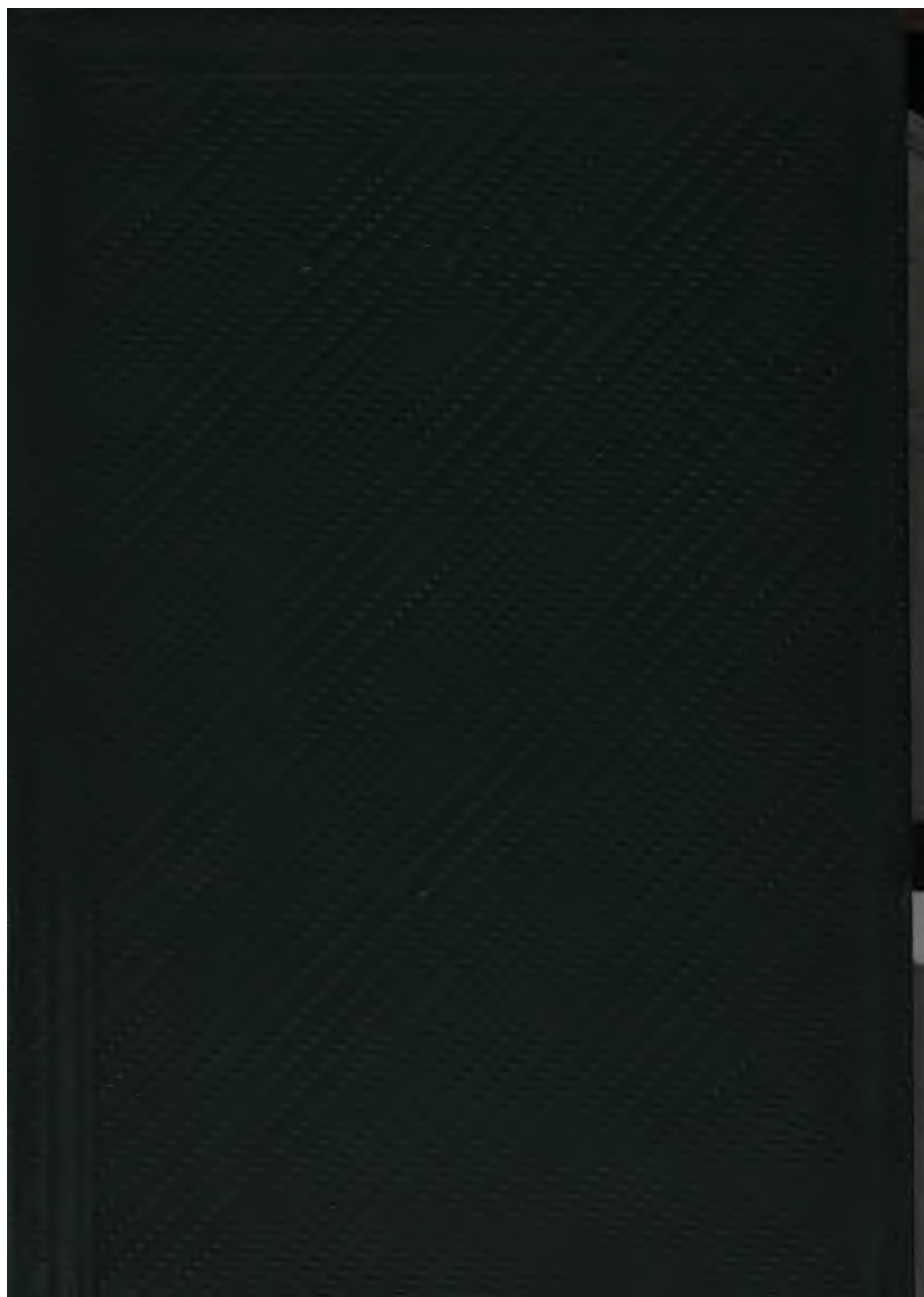
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JANET'S HOME.



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JANET'S HOME.

CHAPTER I.

" There is no friend like a sister,
In calm or stormy weather,
To cheer one on the tedious way,
To fetch one if one goes astray,
To lift one if one totters down,
To strengthen whilst one stands."

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

I CAN remember, as well as if it were yesterday, the precise moment in my mental life when my self-consciousness was awakened into the overweening activity which has caused me so much trouble and so many mortifications ever since. How often I have tried to send it to sleep again! How many sops, in the shape of sermons on single-mindedness, poems on the beauty of simplicity, philosophical dissertations, have I not administered to my Cerberus, and how complacently it has swallowed and fattened

upon them all. I am, perhaps, giving the largest now, by writing out my recollections of my life, but it is in the confident hope that a full meal may make the hungry, lean, clamorous creature quiet at last. Surely, when I have turned myself inside out, and put myself away in the leaves of a notebook, I shall have done with the subject.

Well, I will begin with that day when I first turned my attention from the outside world to that within, and contemplated my individual I, as the Germans would say.

I was reading the other day, in Jean Paul's life, how he, a poet-child, stood one evening at the door of his father's cottage, looking out on broad, solitary fields, bright with their first winter garment of new snow, and listening to the wind sweeping through the pine-forests behind his house; and how, in that hour, a new thought was borne into his mind, filling it with I know not what sensations of reverence and joy:—"I am an *I*." Not being a poet, I do not understand why he felt so pleased with the discovery, and certainly *my* self-consciousness came to me in a much more commonplace and feminine fashion. I was between eight and nine years old, it was the autumn of the year—the late part of the

autumn—a disagreeable season in our house, when the weather (in our father's opinion) was not cold enough to call for fires in the sitting-rooms, but was (in reality) quite cold enough to cause us children to walk about the house with pinched faces and shivering arms. The light, too, to my thinking, failed at an inconvenient hour, not early enough to make it worth while (in my mother's opinion) to light the lamps before tea, and yet in time to leave a long, dreary blind-man's holiday, which, to a restless child like myself, was particularly irksome.

On the day I am thinking of, I left my little sister alone in the nursery, and slipped down to the drawing-room, where, owing to the larger size of the windows, daylight lingered for a quarter of an hour longer. I was in the most exciting part of "Evelina"—a volume I had stolen from my mother's dressing-room—and I held the book close to the window-pane, and strained my eyes till they grew dim before I could bring myself to leave off reading. When, at last, no word could be spelt out, I sat down on the carpet, under the shade of the curtains, and amused myself by contemplating the fantastic pictures which my rapid reading had left on my mind. Very fantastic pictures they were for, of course, I only under-

stood a third of the book ; but looking back upon them, I began (for the first time in my life) to try to draw some conclusion from what I had been reading. I thought over the strange actions and sayings of the people whose society I had just left, and made an effort to reconcile them with the manners and opinions of the people among whom I lived. Before long, amid much confusion, one point of difference grew very clear to me—I discovered that my book taught that there was another way of dividing the inhabitants of the world beside that old one of bad and good, to which I had been accustomed. Men and women were not only bad or good, they were also beautiful or ugly ; and this distinction, when I had once admitted it, struck me as admitting a breadth of separation to which it was strange I could so long have been blind. To be beautiful was clearly to be happy, admirable, glorious ; to be ugly was not exactly a disgrace—my conscience would not let me think that—but something extremely undesirable and inglorious ; something that a person, somehow or other, ought not to be. I had not thought about myself so far, but I think I must have been on the verge of it, when my attention was called from my own reflections by hearing my name spoken ; and

peeping through the curtain, I discovered that my mother, and a neighbour who sometimes came to spend the evening with her, had entered the drawing-room during my reverie, and were talking together.

"Yes," I heard my mother say, "you are quite right; I am very uneasy about the way in which Janet's teeth are coming. If she had had the best teeth in the world, her mouth would still have looked too large. As it is, I dread to think how she will look."

"Oh, perhaps her teeth will improve," I heard good-natured Mrs. Wilton answer. "Janet is just now at an ugly age; one cannot, at nine years old, say how a girl will look when she is grown up."

There was a pause, and then my mother sighed. "Oh, my dear Mrs. Wilton, I know quite well how Janet will look when she is grown up. I am not one of those mothers who cannot see their children's imperfections; my anxiety makes me keen-sighted. I see clearly enough that Janet can never be otherwise than very plain; she has not one good feature in her face except her eyes, and her complexion is hopeless."

"You call it so, because your other children have such beautiful complexions. How exquisitely fair

Ernestine is ! how lovely she promises to be !—and Charlie, I do think, is the handsomest boy I ever saw in my life."

"Charlie is very well, and Ernestine will, I suppose, be pretty ; that makes me the more sorry about Janet. When there are only two sisters, it is a pity they should be so unlike. I shall never know how to dress them."

"Janet is like Hilary."

"Oh, no !" cried my mother ; "Hilary's face is far better featured ; and besides, in a boy it does not signify."

"No ; and after all, dear Mrs. Scott " (I noticed here a change in the voice—more gravity, and less sincerity in its tone)—"after all, what does it signify for any one? 'Vanity of vanities,' you know."

"Yes—yes, of course—of course," my mother interrupted, rather sharply. "I intend to bring up both Janet and Ernestine to think nothing about appearance. I shall tell them, if ever I speak on the subject at all, that it is not of the *slightest* consequence whether they are pretty or plain. But still, I must confess it is a mortification to me that Janet should not be a little better-looking ; and I am very sorry that Mr. Scott set his face so decidedly

against my taking her to a dentist about her teeth six months ago. Unhappily, you see, Mr. Scott has peculiar theories."

At this point of the conversation, I covered my ears with my hands, and honestly tried not to listen further; even at nine years old, I did not like the tone in which my dear mother would sometimes speak of my dear father's "theories;" and, besides, I had more than enough to think about. I was not, at first, either hurt or humbled by the information I had so suddenly received about myself; the prominent feeling was wonder, that I, Janet Scott, should have been made a subject of conversation between two grown-up people; that I should be recognised at all, except as "one of the children." I was surprised that Mrs. Wilton should have noticed whether my teeth were growing straight or crooked, that my mother should be distressed about it, and, above all, that my father should have troubled himself to "set his face" against a purpose that only concerned me. I think, now, that it speaks well for my education that I had reached the age of nine in such desirable unconsciousness of my importance to my elders; that one overheard conversation destroyed all the advantage I might have derived from the

extra care with which, as I now know, my father's wisdom surrounded us.

I sat and thought, at first a little elate and consequential ; but by degrees a painful feeling of loneliness stole over me. It was true that people talked about me, and thought of me, but then it was to find fault. I had been singled out from the family group, but then it was to be judged for deficiencies which the others did not share. The thought brought with it a painful sullen sense of separation. I felt glad that the curtain hid me from general observation ; I hoped that my brothers and sister would not come to look for me ; I wished that they might all forget me, and that I might have to sit in the cold, supperless, till bed-time.

From this evil mood I was delivered at last by my eldest brother Hilary. I had heard him enter the house, and run up into the nursery, and then down to the library, to look for me, with a sullen resolve not to stir ; but when at last he tracked me to my hiding-place, and I caught sight of his good-humoured face cautiously insinuated between the curtains, I could resist no longer.

" Did not you know that I had come home ? " he said, when he had lured me from the drawing-room.

“What could make you hide from me? Such waste of time. Come and feed the fish in the garret before the bell rings for tea.”

The proposition softened my ill-humour for a time; I was proud of being the only person whom Hilary ever invited to accompany him to a certain lumber-room at the top of the house, where my mother allowed him to keep some pet fish and various other nondescript treasures. How well I can picture the oddly-shaped room as it looked that evening, while the rays of Hilary's dim candle were struggling to drive back the darkness from the middle of the room to the awful corners where day and night it lingered. Those corners were the veritable home of darkness to me. On long winter afternoons, when Hilary and I were alone in the garret, I used to watch the thing, rising from its lurking-place, creeping closer to me, till I felt it on my face, and then stealing downstairs, creeping lower and lower, till it filled the house. I could not have borne this if I had been quite alone, but there was something in Hilary's presence that sent nervous fears to sleep; whenever my fancies, Frankenstein-like, rose up against me, to terrify me with the fearfulness I had given them, I had only to move a little nearer Hilary, or to look across the

room at his sensible, strong face, to feel perfectly safe. We often spent long afternoons in the garret together, Hilary and I. I had always at hand a secret store of books, taken at random from my father's library, which I read greedily, with or without understanding, as the case might be. Hilary had pursuits of his own quite as absorbing. The favourite one was tending a colony of sticklebacks and tadpoles, which he kept in an old water-butt. Looking up from my book, I was sometimes surprised to see how long he would stand upright, with his hands behind him, staring down into the stagnant dark-coloured water, and how eager and intent his eyes grew every now and then.

"What are you seeing?" I used to ask impatiently, sometimes.

"Come and look yourself," he would answer; for Hilary, unlike the rest of the family, was sparing of words. When I looked, however, I could never see anything but green slimy stones, and long, thin leaves of water-weeds, stirred languidly by the transit of a small fish or the evolutions of some shapeless monster, all head or all tail, that I could hardly look at without disgust.

But I am wandering far from the events of that

evening. I remained tolerably happy while I fed Hilary's fish. I knew there was no possibility of making him understand the nature of my discontent, therefore I put it aside while I was in his company, and took it up again when I returned to the nursery, and found myself left alone with my younger sister Ernestine. She had suffered from some childish illness, and was slowly recovering from it. She was always a delicate child, and was often, for weeks together, unable to share the rather hardy way of life my father prescribed for us elder ones. I sometimes came in for a share of her privileges. The one I valued most was being allowed to spend the evening with her in the comfortable nursery, instead of having to go down to the dining-room, and learn my lessons in company with my brothers, under my father's strict eye. Ernestine had begged this indulgence for me on that evening, and was waiting tea for me when I returned from the garret. Two white cups and plates stood on the nursery table, and on each of them Nesta had placed an equal portion of the good things my mother had provided to tempt her delicate appetite. I was in a very perverse mood, for the sight of this preparation for my comfort vexed, instead of pleased me. I wanted an excuse for feeling

angry with Ernestine, whom I had heard praised at my expense, and I did not like to have to be obliged to her. I refused to taste any of her proffered dainties, telling her that they were *hers*, and not *mine*; and insisted on eating nothing but the basin of bread-and-milk the servant had brought up, as a matter of course, for my supper. It was very cruel of me; I knew quite well that by doing so I was taking the sweetness from every morsel that Ernestine tasted. She soon left off eating, and sat looking wistfully at me, as I plodded through my basin of milk, and turned over the pages of "Evelina." After tea, as I still sat sulkily silent, she crouched down on the rug at my feet, and satisfied herself by lifting up her hand and every now and then softly stroking mine. Though not much more than a year younger than I was, she was a very much smaller child, and she had always hung upon me with that sort of absorbed love which one often sees a delicate younger child bestow on a stronger elder one. The servants, and even my mother, used to say that it was a pity that Ernestine was so silly about Janet. I remember, when she could just speak plain, she was trotting after me somewhere, and she suddenly looked up and said, with the air of one who has made a great dis-

covery, "Janet, you and I are two 'each others.'" I cannot see any meaning in the phrase now, but I did then, with the comment that Ernestine's brown eyes put upon it; and I partly understood the satisfaction she had in repeating it constantly. It was a sort of creed with her for years. I did my best to shake her faith in it that night. Tired of being silent, at last, she timidly touched my hand, and said, "Janet, please speak to me."

I was by this time not disinclined to talk out the thought that oppressed my mind. "I have something to tell you, Nesta," I said. "I don't mean to have you for my friend any more. I mean to have Hilary for my friend, and Charlie shall be yours."

"Oh, Janet, why?"

"Because friends should be alike, and I am like Hilary."

"But I will choose to be like you."

"You cannot choose," I said, solemnly. "I have heard all about it from mamma. You are very pretty, and I am very ugly. I know, though you don't, what a difference that makes."

"Tell me what difference."

I was puzzled, among all the half-formed notions I had gathered from "Evelina," to find one that I could

put into words. I pondered a little, and then I began to describe to Nesta how this difference would probably affect us when we were both grown up—how every one would admire and love her because she was beautiful, and give her splendid presents and take her to wonderful places; and how I should have to stay at home, and be of no account at all, because I was ugly. I grew interested in the picture I was drawing, as I went on; and as I took care to represent myself in a sufficiently injured and interesting light, I began to think I should not so much dislike my position in it after all. Nesta sat looking up at me with her believing eyes; when I had finished I was rather frightened to see that her little face had grown pale, and that there was an expression of pain on it.

“Oh, Janet, how dreadful!” she said. “I don’t think I shall be able to bear it.”

“Bear what? Don’t you see that you are to be very happy, and have all sorts of nice things?”

“I—by myself? But, Janet, I *cannot* have anything that you have not: please don’t say that I must. Don’t make it out so. Let it be as it used to be—that we are two each others.”

“But that is nonsense, Nesta,” I said. “You are

yourself, and I am *myself*—you *must* learn to understand that—you ought to be glad. Don't you think it is nice to be pretty?"

"No; not unless you are prettier. I would ask people to like you best; but you seem to think they would not. It would be very sad for me. I don't know what I should do."

I began to think that there was a still greater contrast between Nesta and myself than the external one to which my mother had opened my eyes. I was ashamed of my own selfish humour, and sorry that I had troubled my poor little sister with it.

"Well, we won't think any more about it now, Nesta," I said. "You shall sit on my knee, and I will tell you all about Evelina and the Broughtons."

The rest of the evening passed in our usual interminable talk, but the wistful expression did not leave Nesta's face; and in the middle of the night I was wakened by the sound of her sobbing.

"What is the matter, Nesta?" I asked.

"Oh, Janet, I have had such a dreadful dream. I thought I was in a beautiful place, and that you were not there; I was looking for you, and calling you, and you would not come."

"It was only a dream," I said.

"I know that; but, Janet, will you say that you don't *really* think I ever need have any thing that you have not?"

I soothed her to sleep again, and resolved to be more careful what I said to her for the future. I had sense enough to know that Nesta was not a child to whom a fit of crying did no injury; she was far too fragile to have one without suffering for it afterwards. I think I began to be careful over Nesta from that evening.

The contrast in our looks, which might possibly have been a cause of division, became, from that time, a new bond of union. I could not be jealous of the admiration Nesta's beauty excited, when I saw as I did how every word of praise pained her, unless she could persuade herself that it applied equally to me. I knew that she would gladly have taken off her beauty like a garment, and clothed me with it if she could. If we could have had that, as we had every other possession, "between us," she would have valued it; without that possibility, it was a burden to her.

CHAPTER II.

*„In des Herzens heilig stille Räume
Mußt du fliehen aus des Lebens Drang;
Freiheit ist nur in dem Reich der Träume.“*

SCHILLER.

I FANCY that I was not allowed to spend my evenings so frequently with Nesta in the nursery after I was nine years old, for I remember fewer and fewer such occasions as time passed on; and yet, in looking back on my childhood, it is still the evenings that I remember vividly. It almost seems to me as if, in our old home, it was always evening.

My father was the head-master of B—— School, where my brothers were pupils. He was also professor of history at one of the London colleges; and the duties consequent on his position were so engrossing, that, during the greater part of every day, and for three evenings of each week, Nesta and I

hardly saw him. Even when he was in the house, it was not his habit to address many words to any of us children, or to appear as if he were in any way occupied with our proceedings; and yet he was, more emphatically than any other person I ever saw, "the head of his house"—the one who occupied the chief place in the thoughts of every dweller in it, and who gave the character to the life lived there.

The evenings he spent at home were very quiet ones. We sat in the dining-room, for there was no table in the drawing-room large enough to hold the number of books which my father collected round him while he was preparing his lecture for the next evening. He had the lamp and two candles in front of him, for his sight was never good. My mother and we children sat at the opposite end of the table, where our occupations could be carried on without interfering with his. My dear mother, not having such keen eyes as we had, nor the heart to commit such an extravagance as that of burning *more* than two candles, was obliged to restrict her employments to winding skeins of silk or cotton, rolling tape into balls, or unravelling the string and smoothing out, for future use, the paper in which parcels had been packed. How I wondered at the patience which

sustained her over these tasks evening after evening. I used to sit just opposite my father, and the work with which I was supposed to be occupying myself used to fall on my lap many times and stay there, so interested used I to be in watching him. I fancied that I could trace the progress of what he was reading in his face. He sat very upright, his head slightly bent towards his book; the strong light from the lamp fell on his high, broad forehead, from which the dark hair was much worn; his eyebrows were usually slightly knit; the lips pressed in; the rest of the features and figure in perfect repose, while the restless eyes glanced rapidly to and fro on the page with a sort of fierce eagerness in them, as if they would tear the heart out of the book. Sometimes—once, perhaps, in an evening, or not so often—the lips relaxed their pressure, and a slight smile curved their edges, the brows unknit, the eyes rested on a line, or were raised from the book, and I knew by the light in them that my father had read something that had pleased him. In the midst of dry details he had come upon the record of some noble word or deed that thrilled to his heart. Sometimes I have seen him moved so far as to get up from his seat and walk with rapid sounding steps up and down the

room, his head erect, his mouth working. He was not with us at these seasons, I knew that well enough. I had a dim idea of the ages of distance that separated his spirit from us and our concerns; but I longed for courage to go up to him and tell him how I sympathised with him, and longed to be allowed to admire what he admired, and love what he loved.

There were evenings, however, when the study of history (judging its pleasures by my father's face) did not present itself to me under so inviting an aspect. Then the leaves of the books were flitted backwards and forwards with a sharp, impatient sound; my father's brows were knitted tighter as the evening passed on; he fidgetted every now and then in his chair, and I knew he had fallen upon evil times—that his work was a task, and that, instead of being absorbed by it, he was nervously alive to every sound and motion in the room. The fairy Fine-ear, who could hear the grass grow, had not keener senses than my father when he was engaged in writing on a subject, or describing a character, that was distasteful to him. He used to look up at us, if we stirred or whispered, with an expression in his eyes something like that seen in

those of a tortured animal. He seldom spoke, and when he did it was not to administer a sharp rebuke, which, perhaps, we should not have greatly heeded, but to address some carefully-worded sentence to the delinquent in a tone that awed us to the bottom of our hearts. "Hilary, my boy," he would say, "if swinging that ruler up and down does not materially assist you in learning your problem, I shall be obliged to you if you will put it away;" or, "Janet, are there any needles in the world that don't make that incessant click-click in going through the work? If there are, I would give a great deal for you to have them;" or rarely, on very bad evenings, he used to look across the table towards my mother, and observe, in his coldest voice, "My dear Ernestine, some day, when you are quite at leisure, I shall be obliged to you if you will make a calculation of how much you economize in a year by preserving those pieces of string and the papers you are straightening out. I think you will find it hardly repays you for the time you spend over it and for the annoyance it causes me." If my father had thrown books at our heads instead of hurling such sentences as these at us, we should have been more frightened perhaps, but we should not have received

a stronger impression of the depth of his displeasure. My mother, knowing my dear father better than we did, was much more indifferent to these little outbursts of impatience than we ventured to be. She put aside her odd-and-end basket for one evening, but it was sure to come out again in full force the next.

To this basket I owed much of the interest of these evenings, so anxiously did I speculate on the change of each article that emerged from it being folded without creaking, or making the table creak; and yet that anxiety was nothing to the perpetual excitement in which my brother Charlie continued to keep Hilary and me by his manœuvres. It was the delight of his life to torment us by the daring things he did, so cleverly, as just to escape attracting my father's attention, by what appeared the merest good luck in the world. I used to make severe resolutions, sometimes, about keeping my eyes glued down to my work for the whole evening, knowing well that Charlie would soon tire of his antics if we could help watching them; but I never could for long resist the fascination that obliged me to look up against my will. I used to hear Hilary's voice pause in his monotonous repetition of his lesson,

and meaning only to telegraph a warning to him to mind his own business, I used to raise my head, and have my curiosity so excited by the anxious expression in Hilary's eyes, that it was impossible to avoid glancing across the table. Having once looked, all was over; I was certain to be wrought up to a fever-heat of nervous expectation by finding Charlie either in the act of inking the legs of a captured "Father-long-legs," preparatory to turning it loose for a promenade on my father's manuscript, or dropping peas dexterously down the edge of my father's book, or balancing his ink-stand on a suspension-bridge formed by a paper-knife and two infirm dictionaries. Whatever agonies Hilary and I endured, we gained nothing by making grimaces at the delinquent. We only had our warning looks reflected back to us, as exactly as Charlie's beautiful face could be puckered into an imitation of our plain ones. Besides, it was dangerous to tempt Charlie to begin mimicking; there was no saying where he would end, or how long our gravity would hold out against his attacks upon it. I remember one or two terrible evenings when he was too much for us, and we allowed ourselves to be betrayed into sudden uncontrollable fits of laughter, sure to bring upon us a punishment

which Hilary and I considered almost unbearable. My father said nothing on these occasions, but he gathered his books together, and retired with one candle to the fireless study, to work on in the cold and comparative darkness till our bed-time. How miserable I used to be if his eyes looked weaker than usual the next morning.

The silence and constraint of these evenings made us, perhaps, enjoy all the more the liberty which my mother accorded to us when my father was away at the lecture, and we children were left to her guidance. A great deal of talk went on on these occasions, and though Hilary's lessons did not progress favourably, we all enjoyed it very much. My mother loved talking as much as my father loved silence, and she had a singularly happy way of bringing the persons and things she described vividly before her auditors. Listening to her tales of her early days was better than reading a story-book to me, fond as I was of story-books.

"When I lived at home, before I had even seen your father," my mother would generally say, as commencement to her most interesting stories; I remember I used to be a little jealous of the half sigh that accompanied the words, and of the

slightly plaintive look that used to come over my mother's face as she said them. Her eyes looked, I thought, like the eyes of a person looking back at a distant light; and very full of light and fresh air and sunshine were the pictures she used to draw for us. Her old home was a real possession to us children; we knew its every nook and corner, and were acquainted with every person who had much frequented it; with their words and ways, their peculiarities of character, and even their tricks of pronunciation and manner. Her world was sufficiently remote from ours to make her description of it as good as a glimpse into fairyland. My grandfather had been a Welsh country squire, whose importance and riches we exaggerated till he stood to us for a sort of impersonation of everything that was worshipful and dignified. My mother was his only child. They lived in an old rambling house, in one of the most beautiful and least-frequented parts of the coast of North Wales. She used to delight in describing the happy life that she led there during her childhood and early youth. She was her father's companion in long adventurous mountain rides, in rambles on the sea-shore, and in expeditions to different parts of his estate, every farmhouse on which, with its inhabit-

ants, my mother remembered tenderly, and talked about, till we, too, grew into such intimate acquaintance with them, that we fancied we should be able to find our way up every mountain side, and down every glen, within the compass of our grandfather's possessions. Year by year we followed this bright life of hers, until, in our retrospects, we came to the sad day of trial which ended it abruptly. My grandfather, while still in the prime of life, died, and our mother was left a friendless and almost penniless orphan. We never liked her to dwell on the sufferings of the period which followed ; we always tried to keep her engaged with the bright side of the picture ; but now and then sad remembrances would start up, generally at the close of our gayest evenings. When they did come, I think our mother felt it a relief to open her heart, even to us children. There was bitterness, as well as sadness, mixed up with her recollections. It was the bitterness which she found relief in expressing. She could have borne her own loss, she used to tell us, if only she had seen her father's memory honoured, and if the dependants he had favoured had been allowed to retain their old privileges. It had not been so ; the estate had fallen into the hands of comparative strangers, and not only

the squire's daughter, but the whole country-side, suffered from the change.

Our mother used to tell us, till we were almost tired of hearing, how the new possessor drove down in a carriage-and-four from London—"before my poor father was cold in his grave," she used to say; and how the new reign commenced by her having to resign her place as head of the house, and sink into the position of a dependent on the caprices of an over-bearing relative. "Not even a Wynne!" my mother would exclaim, holding up both her white hands. "My dear, Mr. Lester has no more real right to the place than that lamplighter who is coming down the street. I mean, that he is no more of a Wynne than that lamplighter. He claimed it only on account of some money that he had lent my father long before, when they were both young men—mortgages, I think your father calls it; and if I had been a boy, it somehow or other could not have happened. I should have had the estate, and Hilary would have had it after me. I always feel now that it ought by right to be Hilary's; that it really belongs to him much more than to Richard Lester, who, though he married my mother's sister, was no relation at all to the Wynne family."

We all felt the same ; and when my mother went on to describe the sad changes which Mr. Lester had introduced into the good old ways of the house, we glowed with indignation, as against personal and present injuries which we had all an equal right to resent. It was well that our sympathies were readily called out, for sometimes my mother's story would grow a little unintelligible to us children. We could not always see the sting of those sayings of her aunt's, which she used to repeat to us with a little glow on her cheek ; or understand why the house should have been so much more intolerable when Sandford Lester, her cousin, returned home from Oxford, for the long vacation, with his tutor, Mr. Scott. Neither could we enter into the feelings which gave our mother's voice a tone of triumph when she ended her stories always in the same words : " However, as you know, my dears, it was your father, and not my cousin Sandford, whom I married. Very glad I was to get away from them all. I was married at the end of that year, and we came to live in London, in that little house in West Street, which I have often pointed out to you, where grandmamma Scott died, and where Hilary was born."

When our mother's narrative reached this point, it

invariably came to an end. She would suddenly take up some piece of work that she had allowed to fall idly on her lap and begin sewing diligently, while Hilary and Charlie, impelled by a similar impulse, would fall to buzzing over their lessons with a great show of attention.

The mention of my father, and grandmamma Scott, and the house in West Street, brought us all back to our present world, and made us recollect how idly we were spending our evenings. My mother had never visited Wales since she married, but her intercourse with Mr. Lester had not entirely ceased. A small, very small corner of the old estate—a few fields and an out-of-the-way farm-house—still remained in her possession. Some legal right had prevented her father from mortgaging this particular tract of land when he had entered into the mining speculations, upon the success of which he had risked the possession of all the rest of his property ; it therefore remained inalienably ours. How proud we all were of those few fields ! Hilary's estate, we called it. It was the centre of the earth to us, as Jerusalem was to the old map makers.

Mr. Lester rented this farm of our mother. Every year, on certain never-varying days, the postman

brought to our door a letter with a large coat-of-arms seal, addressed to Mrs. Scott, and containing a mysterious-looking paper within it. This was the rent of the farm, due to our mother, and sent always in the form of a cheque, and accompanied by a short friendly letter from her uncle, which my mother invariably read aloud to us. I think she felt the very reading of the post-mark outside like a breath of mountain air.

Nesta and I had pleasant holiday-times on those four days of the year. My mother used generally to take us with her in a cab to the bank, to get her cheque cashed, and then we used to go out shopping with the money.

My mother had a great respect for articles purchased with Morfa money. She expected them to last twice as long as any others, and to be twice as tenderly cared for. I, who was always unlucky about my dress, was well pleased that the money could seldom be spun out till the time arrived for my wants to be taken into consideration; so many household deficiencies had to be first supplied; but if my father or Hilary had chanced to express a wish which money could gratify, my mother was sure to remember it on those days. How radiant she

used to look when she came in with her purchases and displayed them to us all. I can remember some golden evenings, when my father would sit at his end of the table, too happily absorbed with some newly-purchased treasure of a book to heed the gay noisy unpacking of parcels that was going on at ours; but to notice, as I did, the accumulation of crumpled paper which my mother was complacently stowing away for his and my torture on future evenings.

With so little outward variety did our mornings and evenings succeed each other for many years, that, in looking back upon them, it is difficult to believe that each one changed us as it passed; that we grew from childhood to youth in that noiseless way. For myself, my time passed, for the most part, in a pleasant dream; the burden of self was laid aside, because I ceased to be myself to my own consciousness. I peopled the house with phantoms among which I moved; they were to me the substantial realities of my life, while the living people round me dwindled to shadows.

“ When they spake

Each voice was thin as voices from the grave,
And deep asleep I seemed yet broad awake.”

Unfortunately for me, Nesta was always watching to save me from the inconveniences of this dangerous

state. She supplied me with hands, eyes, memory, and observation, and guided me about as a sleep-walker might be guided by a careful friend who feared for him the shock of a too sudden waking. In spite of all her watchfulness, however, I experienced every now and then the cold shock of being brought suddenly from my dreamland face to face with the realities of every-day life. Some rude contact with fact would shiver my whole existence to pieces, and a sudden overwhelming sense of self-disgust and utter discouragement would fall upon me. I cannot describe the pain to any one who has not felt it. It was usually the having failed in some very obvious duty, or made some very ridiculous mistake, that caused the scales to fall from my eyes. I used to hear, not faintly, but with the distinctness of a doom, the gentle despairing reproof, which was all my mother ever thought it worth while to bestow upon me. "Well, this is just like you, Janet; I never expect any help or comfort from you—I give you up! You never will be like anybody else! What use is all your reading, when you can't do the simplest thing that you are told!"

I used always to acknowledge, in my inmost heart, the justice of these sentences. If I could have felt

myself the least bit ill-used, I should not have suffered as I did. For all the time I had such a high ideal of what I should like to be, such a longing to be important to others, that it was no wonder I was thrown by those mild reproofs into a state of tumult, which puzzled my poor mother as much as my usual inertness did.

Hilary was my best helper in my times of disgrace and woe. We had many a talk over my troubles in the old garret, where I used to retire after a scolding, to cry at my leisure, and wait for Hilary's return from school. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that I talked, and that Hilary proved his sympathy by listening patiently while I abused myself. He used to sit by my side on the little window-seat, his elbows on his knees, and a puzzled frown on his face, only stopping me now and then to make me repeat some exaggerated phrase, and to question its truth in a matter-of-fact way, which sometimes forced me to laugh heartily, and brought me to reason. When I could not, or would not laugh, Hilary had another resource for bringing my complaints to an end. "Well, Janet," he would say, "if you are as stupid and ugly and unfortunate as you say, and if my mother does think that you will

never do anything like other people, there is at least one thing which already you do better than any one else—you are the best hand in the world at looking out words in the dictionary, and finding out what sense there is in Virgil and Homer—so dry your eyes, and come downstairs, while there is time for us to go through to-morrow's construing before tea." I remember distinctly that Hilary always found more words to look out, and seemed more hopelessly puzzled about the sense of the passage he was preparing, when I was in disgrace with the elders of the family, than when things were going on smoothly.

I learned enough Latin and Greek during those half-hours to be able to profit by the extra lessons, which my father began to give Hilary in the evening, when the time for his finally leaving school drew near. There was a scholarship attached to the school of which my father was head-master, and my father, to the terrible dismay of the whole family, came to the conclusion that there was nothing to prevent Hilary's gaining it. No one ever thought of saying that Hilary was dull, or even not clever. My father, on one or two occasions, had been heard to pronounce that there was the making of a very solid scholar in him, but I for one felt that his scholarship would

never be of my father's making. Hilary's was a slow-moving, exact mind, very observant of facts, and capable of pondering endlessly on their bearing on each other, but extremely indifferent to modes of expression and delicate questions of taste. He never could be made to see why Homer and Demosthenes were to be so devoutly worshipped for using one word in a particular place instead of another. Even I used to catch a spark of enthusiasm when my father, now and then, made impatient by Hilary's slow way of turning over the leaves of his book, would begin himself to read the portion that was to form their evening's lesson; rolling out the grand, Greek words in his fine voice, and emphasizing one here and there with a loving intonation, as if the speaking of it gave him an actual sensation of pleasure. I used to look across anxiously at Hilary, but there never was any answering look of intelligence on his face; the colour used to go tingling up to the very roots of his hair, but his agitation was caused by shame for his own stupidity and dread of what was sure to follow. It was always a bad beginning for the evening when my father read the lesson aloud. Hilary used always to begin his translation in a more husky, indifferent voice than usual, and my

father's impatient tap-tap on the table used to come before the end of the first sentence.

Hilary's construing was seldom inexact, but even I knew why it tortured my father, and I could have told beforehand the point at which they would break down. Hilary's equivalent for the word my father had emphasized was sure not to be a happy one; then the tap-tap ceased, and my father turned to Charlie with a look of relief. When this occurred, Nesta and I sometimes trembled in fear of a catastrophe, which, however, never came. Up to the moment of my father's calling upon him, Charlie would probably have been happily engaged in reading a story-book under the table, or intent on stealing a pinch of snuff from my father's box, to administer to a certain favourite black cat that shared my father's arm-chair, and was supposed to know more Greek than Hilary. We were always in terror lest his inattention should at length bring him into serious disgrace, but it never did. Two anxious minutes would follow my father's appeal, and then, after one rapid glance down the page, Charlie would begin, stumbling very much at first, and making a glaring mistake or two; but warming up with the subject as he went on, and when the critical passage was reached, out would come

some telling word—not the most literal translation, perhaps, but some happy, unexpected word—just what was wanted to bring out the picture or the sentiment, which Hilary had let slip. Charlie would look up triumphantly as he spoke, shaking back the dark curls from his eyes in his easy, self-satisfied way, and my father would often, with a half bend of his head, say, “Thank you, Charlie;” on which Charlie smiled exultingly, and slipped back to his book, or his experiment on the cat; and Hilary swallowed a great lump in his throat, and thought what he would have given to be addressed by his father in that tone, and looked at with that proud, fond look.

These evening lessons continued during three years, for Hilary failed *twice* in his trials for the scholarship. The third was necessarily the last and decisive time. Two trials and failures were not unusual; my father had spoken cheerfully about them, hiding bravely any mortification he might have felt, and treating Hilary with unusual kindness, and even a sort of respect, after his disappointments.

Charlie's first trial for the scholarship was obliged to take place in the same year as Hilary's last. My father was sorry that the two brothers should thus be placed in the position of trying against each

other; but he thought that there was no chance of Charlie's succeeding on his first trial, and he considered the experience he would gain by passing through one examination so necessary to his success in the second, that he would not allow him to miss it.

I remember feeling a little provoked on the evening before the examination, when I heard Charlie observe to Nesta, that of course he had not been working hard; he knew well enough that he was not expected to do much; he should take it very easily.

"Certainly you would not win from Hilary, if you could?" said Nesta, as if there was really hardly any occasion to state so obvious a fact. She was kneeling before an arm-chair, in which Charlie was reclining, taking off his boots and putting on his slippers, as she said this. Hilary came from the other end of the room to take the boots out of her hand, and answered Charlie's remark, "Fair play and no favour, Charlie," he said; "win if you can. Do you think I shall be jealous of you?" There was something in Hilary's face as he looked steadily down that put all Charlie's little affectations and conceits to flight. He jumped up in his quick impulsive way, and threw his arms round Hilary's neck. "Hilary, I am an ass!" he said; "and if those

fools of examiners were to put me before you, I would—”

“Take the scholarship and be thankful for it; you could not help yourself,” Hilary concluded.

Charlie flung himself back into his chair as hastily as he had left it. “There, it is just as I have always said; you think me a brute, then?”

“Oh, boys, you have no time to quarrel to-night,” Nesta interposed; and, I remember, she considered it a striking proof of Charlie’s brotherly affection that he allowed himself to be silenced by her coaxing, and consented to amuse herself quietly with a novel, while Hilary and I turned over the pages of his well-read Thucydides, and wondered in which of the least-known chapters it would be his fate to be tried on the morrow.

CHAPTER III.

"I read and sigh, I wish I were a tree ;
For sure then I should grow
To fruit or shade. At least, some bird would trust
Her household to me, and I should be just."

HERBERT.

THE next morning was not only the first day of the examination, but Hilary's eighteenth birthday. We all stood at the window—Nesta, my mother, and I—to watch my father and the boys as they left the house. Hilary was well-grown for his age, very nearly as tall as my father; and my father now always walked to school leaning on his arm. For the last two years, since a certain day, when I had confided to Hilary an uneasy suspicion of mine, that there was more amiss with our father's eyes than he chose to let any one know, Hilary had always been very careful to be in the way at the precise moment when my father left the house; if he had

not been at hand, my father would never have asked for him. This arrangement was not always convenient to Hilary. My father walked slowly, and the half-hour's quiet looking-over of the day's lessons which he would have had if he had stayed at home till Charlie started for the schoolhouse, would have been very valuable to him—saved him many a rebuke and the loss of many a place in his class; but since his mind had been awakened to share my fears, the wish to accompany my father in his walk through the crowded streets had always stood first with Hilary.

On that day they all three, for once, set off together; Charlie, lagging a little behind the other two, looked rather pale and glum, I pitied him more than I pitied Hilary. He had, I knew, made up his mind to be beaten in the trial for the scholarship; and though he intended to comfort himself with the conviction that it was with his own will, he was so accustomed to be first in every school-examination in which he took part, that I knew his vanity would find the failure a bitter pill to swallow.

My mother talked about the boys all day. She took me upstairs with her, to help to sort the linen (it was Monday morning); and while I stood by

her side before the sacred linen closet, instead of receiving the usual weekly lesson on the relative value of our best table-linen brought from Morfa, and marked with a "W," and the common everyday sort, marked with an "S," I was, almost for the first time in my life, made the confidant of my gentle mother's cares.

"You are getting old enough to be a comfort to me now, Janet," she said; "I often want some one to talk to. Stay, my dear, you have dropped a best Wynne dinner-napkin on the ground—there, don't put it with the common coarse Scotts; it belongs to this side of the closet. Yes, Janet, I do feel very lonely sometimes, and now I think my daughters ought to be a help to me. Your father is, of course, the very best man in all the world—(keep back those six Wynne dinner-napkins, my dear; they want darning)—but then, you see, he always seems to be thinking of something else while I am talking to him, and you are just like him, Janet. I have allowed you to go on with all this learning because I thought you were a help to Hilary; and, of course, everything must give way to the boys; but when Hilary has once got his scholarship, and gone to college, you must turn your attention to useful

things. I feel nearly sure that he will succeed this time. I wonder whether the examiners will know who he is? I told your father this morning that it was quite his duty to let them know. Surely they would never think of preventing his having a scholarship, which is only worth fifty pounds a year, if they knew that he ought, by rights, to have all those thousands which my uncle Lester is keeping from him? I believe he might have had the scholarship long ago, if your father had represented things properly; but, unfortunately, he never has felt as I do about Hilary's rights."

I listened to all this, and to much more of the same kind, with the vague feeling of elation that very young people have when their elders first talk to them on an equal footing.

When I was dismissed at last with the six Wynne dinner-napkins to darn, I sat down to my work with the conviction that I too, as well as Hilary, had taken a step forward in life that day. As I sat at the window, straining my eyes, weak-sighted like my father's, with most elaborately careful darning, I built a castle in the air, in which I saw myself the central figure of the family, the confidant of my mother, the guide of my worshipping sister, the

helper of father and brothers, the mainspring of the house. I was to be very humble all the time, and people were to wonder at my goodness and usefulness. During the last darn, I settled that my personal appearance should prove by no means so plain as my mother and Mrs. Wilton anticipated.

Just as I had finished, Nesta, who had been following my mother about the house, came in to help me to fold the napkins, and discovered that I had darned them on the *right*, or rather on the wrong side. I had taken extreme pains with the darning, and done it, as Nesta affectionately pointed out, beautifully, but it had not occurred to me that it signified on which side of the cloth I put my work. It had, of course, all to come out again, and I never shall forget the expression on my poor mother's face when she found us pulling far larger holes in her beloved damask than those I had originally offered to mend. For the moment, I think she despaired of me, and seriously in her heart wondered what bad end I could come to. I know I was thoroughly frightened about myself, and suffered for an hour or two such remorse as I have heard murderers described as feeling. I sat all the afternoon in the window-seat, my eyes too much inflamed with crying

to be capable of accomplishing any more fine darning; while Nesta sat at my feet, swiftly with her deft fingers repairing the mischief I had done. She was almost as full of remorse as I was. "It was all my fault, Janet," she said again and again. "I wonder how I could leave you for so long, when you had such difficult work to do. I ought to have run backwards and forwards between mamma and you, to look after you both. It was so very thoughtless of me. I might so easily have put the work into your hands the right way, and then you would have done it beautifully; better than any one else could. You do everything beautifully, dear, only you want me just to look after you a little at the beginning and the end. Why should you cry about that, Janet? I shall always be near to do the little easy things that it would be a waste of time for you to do."

Nesta's longing to be useful was certainly of a different kind from mine; it never occurred to her to make a picture about it.

I allowed myself to be comforted at last by her praise and fondness, and the work was finished and put away. As the evening closed in, my mother joined us in the window, to watch for my father and brothers' return from the schoolhouse.

The usual hour passed, and they did not come; the street grew dark; there was hardly any further use in watching, but we could not make up our minds to leave the window. The lamplighter, Hilary and I always used to look out for when we were children, passed down the street; just as he lighted our lamp, the three figures we were waiting for passed under it; the sudden glare fell upon their faces, and I knew exactly how it was. My father was walking first, talking to Hilary, and Charlie was lagging behind. Nesta ran out to open the door for them, and my mother turned on the gas-light, and went to her usual place at the tea-table.


"Well, how has Hilary done?" she asked, as soon as they came into the room.

"Very creditably; better than I expected," my father answered cheerfully; but his tones did not satisfy me. I knew there would be nothing to be learned by studying his face, so I turned from one to the other of the boys. Hilary's face was steady, but pale; the paleness might be caused by fatigue; nothing would ever make him look triumphant. Charlie's face was flushed, and there was quite a new expression in his usually lazy brown eyes; a restless light, that I had never seen there before.

Did it betoken mortification, or what new excitement?

We knew that we could not hear decisive tidings of the scholarship that evening. The examiners would take a day or two to consider the merits of the different candidates before declaring their decision. To be assured that Hilary had done well was all the satisfaction we had any right to expect.

It was a lecture night ; and as my father was later than usual in coming home we sat down at once to the tea-table. Hilary gratified my mother by eating with his usual schoolboy appetite. Charlie drank large draughts of tea, and played with his spoon. My father soon pushed his plate and cup from him, rose from the table, collected his books, and walked to the door ; then he turned, came back, and stood for a minute or two opposite Hilary, looking at him. " Hilary, my boy," he said, " it is better that you should not be kept in suspense ; I have heard what the decision of the examiners is likely to be ; You have done your best ; I am satisfied with you ; but you have failed again. Mr. Carr, the youngest of the examiners, my late pupil, told me before I left the school that, though you had done better than any of the candidates of your own age, he and his coadjutors



considered that there was one among the younger scholars to whom they should feel obliged to give the first place. It is Charlie who has won the prize!"

I was prepared, but my mother and Nesta were not; they both burst out in exclamations that sounded very like indignation against Charlie. He had jumped up when my father spoke, quite white and trembling, and there was real pain in the tone of his voice when it rose above theirs. "Mamma, Nesta, Hilary, I could not help it! I did not mean—"

My father raised his hand and hushed them all. "Charlie was bound to do his best," he said, rather sternly. "I consider his success an accident; not owing to any superior diligence on his part, but to the unusual course one of the examiners took in his questions. He happened to draw out precisely the sort of knowledge and ability Charlie has. I am sorry, for his sake, that he has succeeded so soon and so easily; it will not be an advantage to him in the end. Now I must go. Hilary, my boy, I know you too well to think it needful to remind you in what spirit disappointment ought to be borne." In passing round the table my father put his hand for an instant on Hilary's head—a most unusual mark of favour with him—and then he left us.

For a minute or two after the door shut behind him we were all silent. Charlie, who was trembling so that he could hardly stand, sat down, and dropped his face in his hands. We none of us knew what to say to him ; we could not congratulate him ; and yet, after my father's reproof, we dare not do anything else.

Hilary looked appealingly at my mother, and then crossed the room and put his arm round Charlie's shoulder. "It is all right ; what is the matter, Charlie ?" he said.

At the touch of Hilary's hand, Charlie lifted up his head, but the glance he got at Hilary's face overcame the last remnant of his self-control ; nothing but flight could save him from the disgrace of being seen crying. He shook himself free, and dashed out of the room ; the next minute the slamming of the bedroom door shook the house.

My mother gave a great sigh, and began to arrange the cups and saucers in the tea-tray. Hilary went to the book-shelf, and took down a book. He held it before him for about half an hour without turning a leaf, while my mother, on the other side of the fireplace, sat wiping away slow tears that trickled silently down her face. Hilary felt each one, I knew.

I saw that he was bracing himself up for some effort. Any expression of feeling was an effort to him. I quite understood what a conquest he had made over himself when he got up, and, kneeling down by the side of my mother's chair, said gently, "Mother, let us talk it over together."

My mother threw both her arms round his neck and uttered a sort of cry, as if some long pent-up feeling had found vent at last. "Oh, Hilary, it is not this that troubles me so; it is not anything you have done. But I have had so many things to grieve me. You are my eldest, and I had planned so for you. When anything goes wrong with you, it brings it all back—all that I have suffered all my altered life. Oh, it seems so long and so sad, sometimes, Hilary." This was almost in a whisper.

Hilary made no answer, but he drew a little nearer, so as to make his strong young shoulder a more comfortable support for my mother's drooping head. He did not look like a schoolboy any longer. In that effort to rise out of his habitual reserve, he had taken his place once for all as the eldest son of the house, and my mother clung to him as she had never clung to any one before; finding, in her silent, cold-mannered eldest son, the support she had so long

wanted—a person she could lean upon, and yet not be in the least afraid of. I suppose her father had been this to her, and she had wanted him till, on that night, Hilary took his place. When I had looked once at Hilary and my mother, I felt as if I ought to leave them. I was not wanted ; and they would talk, when the time came for talking, better alone. Nesta had slipped out of the room while Hilary had been pretending to read. I followed her to Charlie's bedroom. I should not have been welcome there half an hour ago. Nesta was Charlie's chosen confidant when he was in trouble, but by this time his tears were all wept away. I heard his voice in rather eager talk before I entered the room.

"Is that you, Janet?" he said, sitting upright in his bed, where he had been lying when I came in. "What is going on downstairs? What is Hilary doing?"

"Talking to mamma."

"How does he look?"

"Just as usual."

"Ah, what a comfort it is that he does not feel things as I do! He does not, now does he, Janet?"

"No, *not* as you do."

Charlie was too quick not to understand my tone. He gave an impatient kick against the foot of the bed. "That's just the way; you never give me credit for anything, Janet. I've been telling Nesta how this happened; but you won't believe me, I daresay, if I tell you."

"I should like you to tell me how you think it happened?"

"Oh, Janet, you don't know how bad I have felt since it was all over. When my father spoke, and when Hilary looked at me, I could have killed myself. When I went out this morning, I should have knocked any one down who had told me that I should try to win the scholarship from Hilary. I knew I could, but I meant to be careful. I wished just to beat those other fellows in the first class that my father thought I could not beat, but I determined not to answer a single question that Hilary passed, or to write better than he was likely to do. I thought I could imitate the dear old fellow's exact prosy style so perfectly. So I know I should have done if the right examiners had come; but one of the regular old fogies was taken ill, and who do you think the trustees of the school invited to come in his place? Cannot you guess? Has not Hilary told

you? Well, then, it was Shafto Carr—the fellow who was head of the school when I first went there—who has just taken such wonderful honours at college—whom every one is talking about. What possessed him to come and examine us? I wish he had kept away. The instant he began, I knew that it was all over with me. His eyes drew the right answers out of me; and he asked such glorious questions—questions that put thoughts into one's head. I could have shouted out the answers. I found it impossible to pass one. Even when it was not my turn to speak, and I was silent, he seemed to know that I understood him better than the others; for when they hesitated or mistook his meaning, he just turned to me expecting an answer. If you had seen the sort of smile on his face, Janet, you would know how it was that I really could not disappoint him. When we sat down to write on a subject he chose for us, words would come to me. I forgot all about Hilary's style. I wrote on and on and on, till at last Mr. Carr came and took the paper out of my hand, and said that the time was up. He took my paper to the window, and began to read it first. I saw he was curious about it, and when his face brightened I was pleased for a time. At last, the

examiners left the room, and my father came in, looking grave, and I woke up, as it were, and found out what I had been doing. I see you think this *no* excuse; you think me hateful, Janet."

"I don't think it so good an excuse as you seem to do," I said. "What is Mr. Carr to you? You say you could not bear to disappoint him, because he expected you to answer; but you knew all the time that, by answering, you were preparing a bitter disappointment for Hilary and mamma."

"You don't understand me—you don't understand me, Janet," Charlie groaned out.

To my surprise I found, when Nesta and I came to talk over the events of the day together, that she had more sympathy with Charlie than I had. She thought his explanation did in a great degree excuse his conduct. She confessed that she could imagine herself behaving in a somewhat similar way. "For instance," she said, "I think if I had heard a great deal about you, Janet, and thought about you, as Charlie has heard and thought of this Mr. Carr, and if then you had come suddenly and asked me to do something for you, I should have done it directly."

"But I am your sister, Nesta," I said; "you cannot judge by such a comparison as that. You do

everything I wish you to do because I am your sister."

Nesta shook her head. "I don't think it is because you are my sister that I love you so very much. If I had had a different kind of sister, and then seen you, I should have loved you best, because you are just yourself."

"But I think that would have been wrong," I persisted, somewhat disturbed to find that there was a matter of opinion on which Nesta and I did not agree. It had been a disturbing day to every one in the house. I daresay Hilary was the one who went to sleep first, and slept the soundest.

CHAPTER IV.

"I hold it true with him who sings,
That men may rise on stepping stones
Of their dead selves to higher things."

In Memoriam.

I DON'T know how we all tumbled into our usual every-day routine the next morning, but I suppose we did so. It was the week before Easter; there were three more days of regular school-work, and then on Thursday evening Hilary made two journeys to the school, and brought away all his school-books. How I sighed as I watched him clapping the dust out of them, and arranging them out of the way on the highest shelf of the dining-room book-case.

Easter Monday was a morning of letters. Besides uninteresting letters for my father and mother, there was a letter for Hilary, and a large packet directed in an unknown hand to Charlie. Letters to the

younger members of our family being rare, we all watched him curiously as he tore open the seals of his packet; a little closely-written note lay at the top. He opened it, looked at the date, and then at the signature.

"Cambridge — Shafto Douglas Carr—oh!" the exclamation was almost breathless; and holding the note high above us, he rushed to the window, though there was quite light enough at the table to read it. When he had finished a second slow perusal of the precious document, he turned his eyes to the breakfast table, and they were actually a little less bright than usual, dimmed with a moisture which he was vigorously trying to wink away.

My father had been watching him with an amused sort of smile. "Well, what has young Carr found to write to you about? It can hardly be a secret, I suppose."

"No, it is no secret. I should like you to see."

Half hesitatingly and half proudly, he put the note in my father's hands, and then dived under the table to pick up the book, which he had thrown down in his impetuous rush to the window. Something he saw on the first page sent the blood rushing once more over his fair face. He looked so long at the

blank leaf, that curiosity prompted me to peep over his shoulder and read, written in a peculiar handwriting, the words, "From the author," and underneath a Latin line—

"Credo equidem nec vana fides genus esse Deorum."

Meantime my father's mouth was wrinkling with unusual smiles. "How like Shafto Carr! he exclaimed, when he had finished reading. "Well, well, four years of easy success have not made him much wiser. He is young enough to take delight in patronising, and you to find pleasure in being patronised; but I must tell you that the advice he gives you about your reading is not worth much. So he has sent you his book, has he?—great stuff I am afraid. Poor boy!"

I fancied the last exclamation must refer to Charlie; it seemed impossible that it could apply to the great; the fortunate Shafto Carr. Charlie did not hear it; he had plunged into the middle of his book,—and he did not get out of it for that, or for many more days. The rest of the party turned their attention to Hilary, who had now finished his letter, and was waiting for an opportunity to speak.

"It is an invitation from my old schoolfellow,

George Armstrong, to stay with his friends at Ryde. He has heard the result of the examination, and he says—read what he says.”

“A sensible, kind letter; the letter of a true friend,” my father pronounced it to be. After a few minutes’ talk, an anxious “Can you spare me?” from Hilary, and a decided “You had much better go,” from my father;—my mother, Nesta, and I rose from the breakfast-table with a great sense of hurry and press of business upon us, to prepare Hilary’s clothes for his first, his very first, visit from home.

Hilary left us on Wednesday, and the house sank into a state of unnatural quiet when he had gone. Charlie, who usually found employment for Nesta and me during the holidays, now divided his time between reading Mr. Carr’s book and making unsuccessful attempts at composing a letter of thanks for it.

I think I should have been quite miserable if it had not been for a few words of talk which I had with my father on the evening of the second day after Hilary left us. He met me in the twilight, roaming up and down the passage at the top of the house, unable to make up my mind either to sit and read in the garret without Hilary or to come down to my

usual place by the dining-room fire. I say "*met*," for we did *meet* in the middle of the passage ; but, as I reflected with amazement afterwards, he must have come up there to look for me. He stopped me, when I almost ran against him in my moody walk, and put his hand on my head. "So, Othello's occupation's gone," he said. "Poor Othello !"

"Papa, I don't know what you mean about Othello," I said.

"Ah, true ; I remember I put a black mark over Othello. You are a good child for respecting the black marks. I have wanted to speak to you for several days, but you kept out of my way. Now that it is over, I must thank you for the service you have done *me* in helping Hilary through his school-work."

"You—Oh, papa !"

"How old are you, Janet ?"

"Fifteen," I answered. He put his hand under my chin, looked into my face, and once more stroked down my rather untidy hair.

"Poor child, I expect you have a good deal of difficult work before you, with yourself, and perhaps for other people. It won't do you any harm to remember that the first piece of work that it fell into

your way to do you did thoroughly, and that your father thanked you for it."

It was too much; and seeing that I could not speak, he was going, but I held him fast. "It was easy work," I faltered, "and I liked it—there was no goodness in that."

"No goodness, but this encouragement, Janet: You have tasted the pleasure of work, and, having accomplished the easy task, you are ready for the hard. For learning to darn on the right side of the stuff, for instance," he added, smiling.

"It is not any one thing," I said, while my whole heart thrilled with gratitude for this unlooked-for sympathy. "I could learn to do one, or two, or any number of tasks; it is *altering myself*—learning to live down among real things that is so difficult. Do you—oh, papa!—do you really think that I shall ever be able to do that?"

"Do you honestly wish it, Janet?"

"Sometimes, but not always," I answered. "Sometimes I feel as if I could not do without a few fancies to walk about among: reality is so bare. How do other people do?" I asked, timidly.

"Some people *love* more than you do, Janet; and to those who love their fellows much, and God even a

little, there is no poorness or barrenness in the most monotonous routine of common life. Such people would smile at your notion of *coming down* to *real* things. Some day you and I must have some further talk. I don't wish you to suppose that, in confining you to *reality*, I am confining you to the *seen* things. Some day, but not now ; for I fancy that, if you went downstairs, you might find that you could do something to help your mother."

A quiet, grave kiss on my forehead ended our talk. I should have liked to run away and shut myself up in my room, to think over what my father had said, but I did not yield to the wish. I went downstairs bravely, and finding my mother in a state of distress about some winter furs which, having been put away in a damp closet, were now suspected of harbouring the moth, I volunteered my services for a thorough turn out of the closet, and actually outdid my mother in zeal during the next two days in carrying out my design. So, with one help and another, the week of Hilary's absence slipped away. It wanted only two days to his return, when, one evening after tea, Charlie and I grew so disputatious over a half-finished game of chess, that my father, who was very tolerant of noise during

the holidays, was driven to exchange a volume of Basnage's "Church History" for a newspaper. It was a tacit reproach to us; I felt it, but I was violently bent on disproving some wild assertion of Charlie's; and the impatient rustling of the paper as my father turned it from side to side, without being able to find anything to arrest his attention, only incited me to talk louder and faster. Charlie's smile grew more provoking as I grew more vehemently in earnest. We were on the verge of one of our brotherly and sisterly quarrels, when we were startled by a sonorous "Ah!" coming from behind the unfolded paper. We both looked round a little apprehensively. Had he been listening to us instead of reading? No—there was no displeasure, but some eagerness in the tone in which he called to me the moment we were silent.

"Janet, my child, come here; read this letter to me; my dim-sighted eyes must be playing me a strange trick; here is a name that I must be reading wrong."

I took the paper, my eye caught a word, and instead of reading aloud I read to myself. What a strange sensation that reading was, and how choked with excitement I felt, when my father's impatient "Well, Janet, well?" and a tremulous "What is the

matter, Janet?" from my mother, obliged me to read aloud.

"It is a letter," I began; "it is headed—

" 'RESCUE FROM DROWNING.

" ' *To the Editor of the Times.*

" ' SIR,—A gallant action was performed here yesterday, which deserves note. A gentleman fell into deep water from the pier at Ryde, and, being unable to swim, had sunk twice, when a youth (whose name we have since ascertained is Hilary Scott, and who, we understand, is the eldest son of the learned head-master of B—— College), hearing a cry, rushed to the spot, and, stripping off his jacket, jumped in, and succeeded in saving the drowning man. His own life was, however, nearly lost in the attempt, for the sinking man clutched him round the neck and drew him under water, and, but for the timely arrival of a boat, probably two corpses would have been brought to shore. If you think a brave action, done by a youth of eighteen, worth recording, perhaps you will give a place to this letter, from

" ' SPECTATOR.' "

How strange the commonplace, kind, concise words of the letter sounded to our excited ears.

"Probably two corpses," my mother groaned, and dropped her face between her two trembling hands. My father got up and walked rapidly up and down the room with that light of enthusiasm on his face that I used to see there sometimes during his evening reading. To think of its being called up by the record of one of Hilary's doings!

Nesta threw herself into my mother's arms, and joined her in the flood of tears that followed the first shock. I had no inclination to cry, but I wished very much that I could have invented an excuse for leaving the room and rushing violently up and down stairs for a few minutes.

When we were composed enough to talk, there was a great hubbub. My mother was for stopping the first cab, rushing off to the station, and starting for Ryde by the next train, that she might ascertain for herself that the boat *had* arrived in time, and that *two corpses* had not been brought to shore. She was only quieted by some very earnest representations from my father, and by my producing a letter of Hilary's bearing a later date than the newspaper, and stating, with unusual distinctness, "I am quite well, and hope to be home the day after to-morrow." Then my father congratulated himself on the firm-

ness with which, three years ago, when we first went to the seaside, he had carried his point of having the boys taught to swim. My mother's acknowledgment that he had been right was not given so unreservedly as he expected. She was not clear that it had been a good thing. If Hilary had not known that he was an expert swimmer, he would not have placed himself in danger. She was not sure that Hilary had done right in risking a life so precious, till it occurred to her that the gentleman he had saved might have a mother living; and *then*, with tearful eyes, she breathed a deep thanksgiving, which included that other mother's escape as well as her own. Charlie and Nesta wondered whether Mr. Carr had read the letter in the newspaper, and what he thought of it. I felt less inclined to talk than the others, and finally escaped to have my three or four runs up and down stairs. What a brilliant fancy world that journey carried me up into!

The next morning brought a letter from Morfa. It was not the usual time for receiving Morfa letters, and it was addressed to my father instead of to my mother. Nesta observed rather disconsolately that it would do us no good, as my father never read his letters aloud as my mother did.

Charlie was in too exalted a state of mind for curiosity about Morfa letters, but an awakening of ideas, suggested by the name, induced him to bring out a piece of information which he would otherwise probably have preferred enjoying alone.

"Mother," he asked eagerly, "do you know who Mr. Carr's mother is?"

"No; how should I, my dear?" my mother answered absently, with eyes fixed on my father, who was slowly unfolding his letter.

Charlie felt that the pith of his news must be given at once, if he would command an audience.

"I'll tell you, then. She is a person you know—a person who once lived near Morfa. She is that same Lady Helen Vane of whom you have often spoken to us—who used to stay with Mr. Lester at Morfa."

I joined my mother in an almost indignant exclamation of incredulity. We both felt something too like spite against Mr. Carr to be willing to allow his mother the distinction of having ever had any connexion with Morfa. Charlie had to give up his authority for his presumptuous assertion before we would believe him, and to confess a clandestine visit to our bookseller's, where, under pretence of

wanting an address for an important letter, he had borrowed a "Burke's Landed Gentry," and studied the genealogy of the Carr family. My mother, once convinced, was as eager to hear more of her old acquaintance as Charlie was to tell what he had discovered; and we were soon so engrossed in our subject that the Morfa letter was forgotten, and my father had actually to knock upon the table when he wanted to attract our notice.

"Nesta was complaining just now," he said, "that I never read my letters aloud; would you like to hear this one?"

"Yes, indeed," we all cried.

"'Dear Friend,'" my father began, "'I have just been reading a letter in to-day's *Times*, that has strongly brought to my mind the fact that I am growing old. You were a young man when I first knew you, and now I see you have a son growing into a young man—a son, apparently, you need not be ashamed of. For old friendship's and relationship's sake, I should be glad to know more of your family. What are you going to do with this son? I shall be in London at the end of the week. Ask my niece to take me in for a day or two, and we will consult together over his future. If you can invent

any way in which I can be of use to your family, you will do me good. Yours, R. Lester.' "

It took us young ones some time to understand that the phrase "my niece" signified our mother, and that the light sentence in which it figured actually contained the astounding proposition of a visit to our house from our great uncle Mr. Lester. My exclamations of delighted surprise were, I suppose, the loudest, for I remember they brought upon me a rebuke from my mother.

"I am surprised at you, Janet," she said, a little indignantly; "you seem to think that my uncle's coming is something to laugh at. You don't consider what trouble it will cause me; and only yesterday, when you spilled the ink over the best bedroom carpet, you said it did not signify, for no visitor would ever come to our house. I hope this will be a lesson to you; it seems almost like a judgment. What are we to do, my dear" (turning to my father), "to prevent my uncle from noticing the state of the best bedroom carpet—indeed, every one of the carpets?"

Conscious of many sins of commission against the carpets, of ink-stains innumerable that might be laid to *his* charge, my father interposed hastily, "My

dear, I will answer for Mr. Lester's not seeing a single article of furniture while he stays. Do you suppose he comes to London to count the spots on your carpets?"

Perhaps not, my mother assented; but she appealed to my father's conscience—Could he look round and say that there was a thing in the room that he should not be ashamed of Mr. Lester's seeing?

Yes, indeed, my father assured her, he could conscientiously say that there were several things in the room of which he was not in the least ashamed—one especially, that Mr. Lester would be surprised to find so little faded; and two others that he really thought could not be matched for fairness.

A glance of smiling meaning from my mother's face to Charlie and Nesta, who were just then whispering with their beautiful heads close together, explained the enigmatical sentence to me. If it had not, my mother's countenance would. A colour, as fresh and delicate as Nesta's, rose to her cheeks; but she shook her head. Fond compliments were well, but a little carefulness over the carpets would have been still better; for, however beautiful one's children, or fond one's husband, there were feelings about furniture that lay too deep to be talked away.

My father left the room, advising my mother to ask Janet to tell her the history of a certain noble Roman lady, called Cornelia; and my mother stopped my mouth, just as I was plunging into it, by begging me earnestly to put all *Roman* ladies quite out of my head, and attend to some directions she should have to give me about making myself look a little more like an *English* one.

During the next few days, in spite of my late resolution, I was perpetually tumbling into a delightful dream-region of wonderful anticipations, where Mr. Lester, Hilary, and the man whose life he had saved, played equally conspicuous parts. When I was forcibly dragged out, I found myself in a very dusty, topsy-turvy world; for my mother's excitement at the prospect of her uncle's visit had moved her to institute a very rigorous house-cleaning, and Nesta and I were expected to take a just share in the work. In the thick of the tumult, on the eve of the day on which Mr. Lester was expected, Hilary returned. I had been longing for a sight of him. It seemed to me an immense time since he went, and his adventure, by dint of being much dwelt upon, had altered my thought of him. It was Hilary, our *own* Hilary, and yet it was a hero we

were expecting that night. I dare say I should not have been disappointed in our first meeting after our first parting, if circumstances had not been very cruelly against me. Instead of arriving in the evening, as his letter had led us to expect, owing to some fresh arrangement of his journey, he walked quietly into the house about four o'clock. I was the only person who recognised his knock, and it came at an unlucky moment for me. I was at work dusting some dishes in a dark closet on the upper staircase-landing, where my mother kept spare china. My face and hands were dusty, and I had a large towel of the coarsest "*Scott*" kind thrown over my arm. While I was mechanically rubbing a plate many unnecessary times, I planned how Hilary would look when he returned, what my father would say, and what my mother would say. Perhaps the "rescued stranger" would accompany Hilary. Would he fall on his knees before my mother to thank her for having such a son? No, I could not quite fancy that. The "rescued stranger's" past was not clear to me, and my reverie was broken before I could decide on it. The well-known knock threw me into an indescribable state of agitation. I rushed blindly downstairs, and, seeing Hilary in the act of hanging

up his hat behind the door, I flew up to him, threw my arms round his neck, and a great fold of the "Scott" towel over his head and eyes.

"What is the matter? What on earth are you doing?" in Hilary's sharpest tone, brought me speedily to my senses. It was a minute before we could get free, and then a very ruffled head of hair, and a red, indignant face, emerged from the folds of the towel.

"I wish you had a little more common sense, and would mind what you are about, Janet," he began.

I felt I deserved a scolding, but I could not stay to let him finish his sentence. I had taken meanwhile a glance round the hall, and discovered that we were not alone. A young man, somewhat older-looking than Hilary, stood in the hall, and, rapid as my glance was before I turned and fled, it showed me that he was on the edge of a burst of laughter. It came before I was out of hearing—frank, good-tempered laughter, ringing through the house so clearly that the door of the dark closet which I shut upon myself could not keep it out. I must chronicle that first laugh, and remember how I sat in the dark working myself up into a state of swelling indignation against it. Oh, it was bitter! If Hilary had

laughed at me I could have borne it; but for the "rescued stranger"—for I concluded that this was he—to enter our house in that mocking spirit, to disappoint all my hopes—it was too much. I did not know whether I hated myself or him most.

Nesta routed me out of the closet in time to dress for tea, and Hilary met me in the passage as I was leaving my room to go downstairs.

"Come, Janet, shake hands properly now," he said. "I wish you had not run away. It would have been better to have stayed and shaken hands with George Armstrong."

"George Armstrong! Was he there too?"

"Yes. Did not you see him? I am sure you saw him."

"Indeed I did not. I saw no one but the stranger, and—oh! Hilary—I am so much disappointed in him!"

"Who? What stranger?"

"The man you saved from drowning, to be sure."

"I declare, Janet, I believe you are out of your mind. What on earth should I have brought him home for? There is no one here but George Armstrong, whom you have seen several times before. You ought to have recollected him."

Not having any satisfactory explanation to give of my folly, I remained silent, and walked soberly down into the dining-room. My mother, who had been out all the afternoon, had not yet returned. My father was standing with his back to the dining-room fire, talking to his late pupil, George Armstrong. He broke off in his discourse as I entered to say, "Armstrong, this is my eldest daughter, Janet, who I think you will hardly remember; she has grown so much since you used to come here four years ago."

Mr. Armstrong walked across the room to meet me, and gave a hearty shake to my stiff hand.

"Oh, we have met to-day before, and I knew Miss Janet directly, but she would not include me in the warmth of her welcome."

"She is very glad to see you," my father answered for me. "We are all delighted to have you here again. Sit down again, George. Come here, Janet, child, and listen to what we are talking about."

It was clearly a bright evening to my father. There were few things he enjoyed more than such a meeting as this with a favourite old pupil, who, since he had passed from under his care, had justified his good opinion and done credit to his training. Seeing him

look so happy, I was obliged to put away my ill-humour; and when I had taken my place by my father's side, the conversation was resumed from the point where I had interrupted it. It was such talk as my father loved, and rarely enjoyed—about new books and new thoughts, and the stir and progress they were making in the literary world. I was not long in perceiving that Hilary's friend was better able to hold his own in such discourse with my father, than the generality of his visitors were. I noticed that, when any subject came up on which he and my father did not think alike, he never argued or set his opinion improperly forward; and that yet, just before the subject dropped, when my father had laid down the law to his heart's content about it, he contrived to say a word or two, which left the impression that his conviction was not changed. Young as he was, he held all his opinions tenaciously. I did not, I confess, however, come to that conclusion unassisted; my father shook his head once and remarked, "Words are wasted on you; you are as obstinate as ever, George."

"Not obstinate, I hope, sir; but I suppose that words are wasted on me. I get my opinions in some other way than through other people's words, and if

they go, they must go as they came. Luckily, I can do with a few very broad ones, and am willing to let other people take them or leave them, as they like."

"Yes," said Hilary, laughing, "as long as people *do* what *you* like, you will let them *think* as *they* like; you pretend to be liberal, and you are the greatest tyrant in the world."

Soon after, my father mentioned Shafto Carr. "How do you like him?" he asked. "How have you got on together at Cambridge? I don't think you were always the very best friends in the world in your school-days."

There was a slight hesitation. "I have seen very little of him. We are in different sets."

"Ah, I comprehend," said my father.

"How do you like his poetry?" asked Charlie.

"I don't understand it."

"That is no answer," objected my father. "Some people admire most what they don't understand."

"I pity you," cried Charlie, scornfully, "if you can admire nothing but what you understand."

"Pity me as much as you please, but let us be accurate. I did not say that I could not admire *any*-thing that I could not understand; I only implied

that I did not admire Carr's poetry, because I could not understand it."

"He's not obliged to write down to your understanding," said Charlie, hotly.

"Nor I to admire what he writes."

"I do believe you are proud of not admiring."

"No, I am not; I am ready to admire as soon as you can show me why I should. Miss Scott, will you help him; I assure you it is a great trouble to me that I have so little imagination. I believe you imaginative people look down upon us matter-of-fact ones as if we had no souls; don't you?"

If I could have said anything very scornful in answer to this speech, which I considered a direct insult, I would gladly have done so. Unfortunately, nothing very clever would come, and I was obliged to remain stupidly silent. Just then, to my great relief, our mother entered the room hurriedly, agitated by the news that Hilary had arrived. After the ridicule that had fallen on my own attempt at welcoming the hero home, I felt rather nervous about what my mother might do, and I wished Mr. Armstrong miles away, when I saw the flushed face with which she entered, and the two trembling hands

held out towards Hilary. I made a little rustling with my work to drown the expected whispered words, but I need not have troubled myself; my mother's greeting to Hilary was too loud for my devices to cover.

She caught his hands, turned his face to the light, and stood for a minute or two looking at it; but no greeting too sacred for satirical ears to hear, followed the silence.

"Hilary," she exclaimed, in an anxious accusing tone, "it is just as I expected; you have come home with a bad cold in your head."

"No, indeed, I have not, mother," cried Hilary, hastening to justify himself, as he always did when my mother brought this terrible accusation against him. "I assure you, I have not taken the least cold."

My mother shook her head and sighed, "You need not make excuses to me, Hilary; I always know when you have a cold. Oh, Hilary! that is all I get by letting you go from me. I shall never be able to trust you again. I dare say, now, you never even thought of changing your clothes."

The greetings were all over now, and Hilary looked as much at home as if he had never been away. During tea, however, a little talk took place about

Hilary's adventure. Mr. Armstrong was the chief speaker. He began telling the story in a light half-joking way, that grated terribly on my ear; but when he came to describe the anxious moment when, after brave struggles, Hilary's head for the second time sank under the water—his voice took quite another tone; a sort of thrill passed through us all at his words. I saw even my father's strong breast heave. My mother, in a tearful voice, inquired after the man whose life Hilary had saved. Was he grateful enough? Did he know how much Hilary was suffering from his exertions on his behalf? Hilary here interposed an indignant protest against the notion of his having suffered anything, or of there being any excuse for all this fuss and nonsense. His patience was so clearly exhausted, that Mr. Armstrong favoured his desire to have no more sentiment talked on the subject, and resolutely nipped in the bud every attempt which my mother and I made to see the rescued man in a pathetic or even interesting light. He had not a *mother*. He would not have been a dreadful loss to his wife and family. He was a middle-aged man, rather stout, and called Higgins. Some ill-natured people had said that he was tipsy when he fell from the pier. Mr. Armstrong did not,

himself, see how he could have performed the feat under other circumstances, but he did not consider the fact so clearly proved that we need believe it if we preferred to doubt.

My mother bore the revelation of these disenchanting facts with more equanimity than I did. It did not take her long to decide that the man who had been the cause of Hilary's having a cold in his head was not likely to be worth much; and holding Hilary's hand in hers, she could, with one more shuddering thanksgiving for his escape from danger, dismiss the subject altogether from her thoughts. He was safe by her side and she had not been building castles in the air.

I hardly knew whether to feel most bewildered or provoked. Never before, in my life, had fancy and fact come into such rude contact. When Nesta and I retired to our room, I sat down on the side of our bed, in too moody a frame of mind to begin the business of preparing for bed. Was life worth the trouble of such constant dressings and undressings, I cynically asked myself, and I meditated on the possibility of reducing myself into a state of utter indifference, as to *being* or *not being*, like the Hindoo's Nirvana, of which I had been lately reading to my father. At

length Nesta, having risen from her prayers, came and seated herself at my feet.

"Does it matter so much, Janet?" she said.

"Yes, it does matter, Nesta," I answered. "I should have thought you would have understood how much. If you don't, we won't talk about it."

"Let me say one thing. Do you remember the sentence that you liked so much in the German book you translated last? Was it not something like this: that we should wish to be to God what a man's hand is to him? Oh, Janet, don't you see, Hilary was God's hand, and He has used him perhaps to save a soul. It does not matter what kind of person it was, God wanted it done. Don't you see how beautiful it is, that Hilary should have done it?"

I did see; it was as if a veil fell from before my eyes. Yes, I had been making pictures; Nesta had looked at the reality. I went to bed with a triumphant heart, determined to brave Mr. Armstrong's satire, and not to attempt aiming at Nirvana.

CHAPTER V.

"A rosebud set with little wilful thorns."

TENNYSON.

By way of contrast to Hilary's having arrived too soon, the other guest, whose coming I had been dreaming over, made himself waited for. During two long evenings we sat in the drawing-room, with the best tea-things on the table, listening to the sound of the carriages as they passed down the street, and feeling a constant disappointment when each one passed our door.

About nine o'clock on the second evening, I grew restless over my book, and stole down to the dining-room to enjoy a brisk walk up and down the room by the firelight. I was rather ashamed of this exercise, and always carefully closed the door after me when I indulged in it. Charlie had peeped in upon me once or twice, and accused me of rushing up and

down like a steam-engine. I hope there was some exaggeration in this, but I must confess that I sometimes found myself much out of breath when some sudden interruption brought me to a stand-still. I remember what it was that checked my romance-weaving that night. My sleeve caught and threw down a volume of Uhland's poems, which Charlie had been reading during tea. I stooped and picked it up, and while smoothing out a crumpled leaf, my eye fell on this verse :—

„Die Sehnsucht und der Träume Webe,
Sie sind der weichen Seele süß;
Doch edler ist ein starkes Streben,
Und macht den schönen Traum gewiß.“

“To long and weave a woof of dreams is sweet unto the feeble soul, but nobler is stout-hearted striving, and makes the dream a reality.”

“The feeble soul” — “nobler is stout-hearted striving!” — those were words to sit still and ponder upon. My “woof of dreams” floated wide, and I retreated gently to the hearthrug to do penance by learning the verse by heart. While I was thus occupied, I heard, as I thought, my father come home from the lecture and go upstairs to the drawing-room ; it must therefore be supper-time, and I knew

I ought to follow him, but I could not help lingering to read and repeat my verse once more. While I was saying it for the last time, with my eyes shut, I heard Nesta come into the room to summon me.

"In one moment, Nesta," I said. There was no answer, but I heard a quick step, very unlike Nesta's. I opened my eyes and looked up. Nesta was not there. A young girl, whom I had never seen before, hastily approached the fireplace. She had a walking-dress on and a heavy shawl, which, on reaching the hearth-rug, she threw off with an impatient gesture. A quick glance all round the room, which took me in, followed, and then she began vigorously pulling at her gloves. I was so much taken by surprise that I watched in silence. The gloves fitted tightly, and the young lady showed great want of skill in handling them. She tore them off, and, to my utter amazement, rolled them up into a ball, and threw them hastily into the brightest cave of the glowing fire I had been reading by. I had a sort of reverence for gloves, having been all my life subject to grievous penalties for losing them, and could hardly believe my eyes when I saw a pair treated in this sacrilegious fashion.

"What did you do that for?" I asked, breathlessly.

The gloves had begun to burn by this time, and gave out a flame that showed me a brown and red face, surmounted by a tangle of thick black curls, through which two large black eyes, at once fierce and shy, looked at me.

An answer quite as unceremonious as my question came. "Oh, I have been meaning to do it all day. Grandpapa *made* me put on *those* this morning, when we left Morfa, and I made up my mind that the first time I saw a fire I would burn them."

"It was very wrong," I suggested.

"I had made up my mind to do it."

The second answer was spoken more hesitatingly than the first; and at the last word, the fierce expression in the eyes, that were looking at me, suddenly went out, and they grew altogether wild and wistful, with a strange unhomelike look in them, such as I imagined the wood-and-water people, of whom I read in my German tales, might wear when they came among mortals. The idea that she was speaking to a stranger seemed suddenly to dawn upon my visitor, now that the excitement of gaining her object had passed. With a shrinking movement she turned from me, and escaped from the room as suddenly as she had entered it. I did not follow her; I sat

still for some minutes on the hearth-rug, wondering what this unexpected apparition might signify. It grew clear to me, at last, that Mr. Lester must have arrived, and that he had brought with him the little granddaughter of whom our mother had sometimes spoken to us.

The appearance of an unexpected guest would not, I feared, be welcome to my mother. I knew she would feel herself obliged to stay in the drawing-room whatever agonies she might be enduring, so I took upon myself to give some directions to the servants about preparing for the young lady's accommodation for the night before I went upstairs.

My mother was presiding at the tea-table, when at last I repaired to the drawing-room. She had contrived to leave the room for a moment or two, for she had got her prettiest cap on—and how pretty she looked in it! with the bright glow on each cheek that excitement always called there, and the soft, glistening of her blue eyes, which told of a few recent tears. My father stood by the fireplace. There was a slight, most unusual flush on his face too, and a half-sad, half-dreamy look of recollection in his eyes, which he was shading from the light with his left hand, as he always did now when he was not using

them. I looked at the familiar faces first ; I was so anxious about the stranger's long-imagined face, that I liked to put off seeing it as long as I could. When I had looked, I did know whether I was satisfied or not. Mr. Lester was a much older man than I had expected to see. Instead of the upright carriage my mother had so often described, there was a stoop in the shoulders, and the face was so ploughed up into innumerable lines and crossings, that I could make nothing out of it. I gave up the attempt to read it at the first glance ; it was beyond my fathoming. No one was speaking when I came in. My mother mentioned my name. Mr. Lester turned ; he fixed his cold grey eyes upon me, and I had a sensation of growing very small and insignificant, and feeling a cold shudder run down my back.

"Your eldest daughter is not at all like what you were," he remarked to my mother ; "the other would be if she had a colour."

"Yes," my mother said, sighing ; "but Nesta never has a colour ; your granddaughter has all the roses." The two children were sitting together, and as my mother spoke we all looked at them. They were too busy to observe us. Nesta was perseveringly offering refreshments to her guest, which

the other was as perseveringly refusing. If one had been bold and the other timid, the contrast could hardly have been so striking as it was between the one's gentle, and the other's sulky, shyness. The little Welsh girl certainly did not appear to advantage, but I was surprised at the expression of disapprobation, almost dislike, which came upon her grandfather's face as he looked at her.

"Rosamond," he said, sharply, "don't you see that Miss Nesta has been offering you some biscuits for the last five minutes? Take one, and don't keep her waiting an instant longer."

It would have required a strong will in a grown-up person to have resisted that tone of command. I was surprised, and almost frightened, at the reluctance and self-will which his granddaughter ventured to show in her manner of obeying it. She very slowly advanced her hand, at the rate of a quarter of an inch a minute, took a broken morsel of biscuit, and placed it on her plate.

"Eat it, Rosamond; I desire you to eat it," said Mr. Lester.

"Oh; do eat it, you must be so hungry," pleaded Nesta.

Rosamond turned her eyes on Nesta for a moment,

and then suddenly snatched up the biscuit and put it into her mouth. I could see her slender throat swell with the effort it cost her to swallow it.

Mr. Lester turned to my mother. "I really owe you many apologies," he said, "for bringing this little wild girl into your well-ordered family without asking your leave, but she shall intrude on you only one night, and by-and-by I will explain my reason for bringing her so suddenly to London."

My mother's kindness inspired her with a happy answer that set us all at ease. "Who but me should you bring her to?" she said. "I was a wild Welsh girl once; I shall think you are reflecting on my past behaviour if you apologize for Rosamond's."

"Thank you," Mr. Lester said, gravely.

A few minutes afterwards, when Mr. Lester was engaged in conversation with my father, my mother directed me to accompany Rosamond to our room, where a bed had been arranged for her.

It was a new experience, I remember then, for Nesta and me to go to bed without a confidential talk over the events of the day. Our guest did not make up for the constraint her presence placed upon us by furnishing any conversation of her own. Our united efforts to draw her out produced very little beyond

replies in monosyllables ; but when we had left off trying to make her talk, and believed her to be safely asleep, she disconcerted us extremely by suddenly vouchsafing a remark. Nesta, in the lowest possible whisper, had asked my opinion of that "poor girl;" before I could answer, a clear, rather shrill voice, from the opposite end of the room, took up the word.

"Why do you call me a poor girl? I am not poor now. I was poor once, when papa and mamma and I lived together ; but I am not now. You should not call me poor."

"I called you poor because I was sorry for you," Nesta said. "I was afraid you were not happy."

There was a long pause, and then the voice, having again resumed its sullen tone, said slowly, "I don't know what you mean ; I am happy enough when people let me alone."

We took the hint, and left the enigma of her strange behaviour undiscussed for the night.

CHAPTER VI.

"I had my wish and way :
My days were strewn with flowers—
There was no month but May ;
But with my years did sorrow twist and grow,
And make a party unawares for woe."

HERBERT.

MR. LESTER persevered in his intention of leaving us on the following day, though my mother brought forward many arguments to induce him to prolong his visit. He had a long interview with my father during the morning ; and immediately after our early dinner he took leave of us, carrying his granddaughter away with him. Nesta and I were not very sorry to see her go, for we had spent a tedious morning in trying in vain to amuse her.

My mother had a headache, and retired to her room when our visitors left us. Our father shut himself up again in his study, and we children spent one of those idle, talking afternoons that people often inflict on themselves when a long-talked-of visit is

over. We were all engaged to spend the evening at the house of one of the under-masters of B— School. My mother was usually rather fond of going out in the evening, but her headache made her feel indisposed for any exertion, and I easily obtained permission to stay at home and make tea for her.

I felt very happy when, after wrapping Nesta up well for an evening walk, and seeing her depart with my father and the boys, I returned to my mother's little dressing-room, to prepare the table for a delightful cosy *tête-à-tête* tea.

I really had not stayed at home from any interested hope of having a private talk with my mother about the Lesters ; but as the evening passed on, my mother professed herself so much better, and showed such a disposition to be communicative, that I felt now, if ever, was the time to have my curiosity fully satisfied.

"Mr. Lester looks old and sad," I began, "and yet he lives at Morfa."

"At Morfa, but not in the old house," my mother answered. "I hope I am not superstitious, but I cannot help thinking that the new house brought a curse with it. After he thought of building that grand house, he was always striving to be grander

and higher, and to live with greater people than himself. Yes, I can trace it all back to that. Three months after my poor father died, the old garden wall began to be pulled down. Ah dear! ah dear!"

"I think it was cruel," I put in hotly, "to make you stay and see it done."

"It was not done when I was there; only one little bit of the garden wall, at least. When the workpeople began to come near the house, we moved out of it. My uncle took a house for us at a place about twelve miles from Morfa, Tann y Bryn (the house under the Hill). It *was* under a hill, in a kind of hollow. We had a great green mountain behind us, and before us, the woods and rising grounds that led up to Lord Denbigh's castle, Penhammon. You have heard me speak of it. Yes; and it was from living near Penhammon that the intimacy between Mr. Lester and the Earl's family grew up—that intimacy that led to so much sorrow. If we had not gone to live close to their grounds, Mr. Lester would not have seen much of the Denbighs, and his plan about Lady Helen would never have taken such strong hold on his mind."

"What plan?" I ventured to ask.

"My dear, I hardly know whether I ought to

speak about it to you. It is not quite easy to make you understand ; you know so little, happily, of the way in which people of the world speak and think— of the importance which they attach to money and rank. Mr. Lester had always had plenty of money, but till he came to Morfa he had never lived in what is called good society ; and it was thought at one time a great condescension on the part of my mother's sister to marry him—indeed, she offended all her own family by doing so. The Welsh county families looked down upon Mr. Lester, and would not visit him when he first came to Morfa. So, perhaps, it was no wonder that he was pleased and proud when the Denbighs noticed him and made much of him. I can remember quite well how the friendship grew closer and closer day by day. Lady Helen and her mother returned to Penhammon from London a week or so after we settled at the cottage, and soon there was hardly a morning when their little pony carriage did not stop at our door.”

“Lady Helen ! Mr. Carr's mother ? Oh, mamma, do tell me what she was like then.”

“She was not pretty ; she had been overtiring herself in London, and she looked very faded and pale, when I first saw her—not a pretty sort of pale-

ness, like Nesta's—a want of colour all over her face; but though she was not pretty, there was something about her more taking than any prettiness. I can't describe it; she was always saying or looking something that one did not expect. Mr. Lester was quite charmed with her; though he was so cold and reserved to most people, he took her into his confidence at once; and used to consult her about the designs for the new house at Morfa. I have seen her sitting for hours before a table covered with plans; when perhaps, she had her riding-habit on and she had said she could only stay two minutes. She used to get interested, and throw off her hat and draw little pictures on the margins of the great drawings with her pencil; and her face, though she had no colour, got a sort of light upon it that made one wonder as one looked. I suppose it was her great interest in the new house that made Mr. Lester wish that she should one day be its mistress—perhaps some such thought had come into her own head. I don't want to judge her, but, at all events, all that summer she was more like a daughter to Mr. Lester than a person he had only known a few months. I found out what was passing in Mr. Lester's mind by the impatience he showed for his son to come home, and the disap-

pointed looks that used to pass between him and my aunt when letters came from Algernon full of excuses for not coming home."

"Algernon Lester, what a pretty name! Why did he not come home? Where was he?"

"He was still at college; and in the summer, when he might have come home if he had liked, he chose to join a party of young men, who were going to travel abroad with a tutor—"

"Papa?"

"Yes, your papa was the tutor; I heard his name first read out in a letter of Algernon Lester's. How little I thought—Ah, my dear, my dear! I am coming to the strange, dreadful part of my life, but it did not begin that summer. In the autumn the Denbighs left Penhammon; I was not sorry; for, indeed, the constant talk between them and my uncle and aunt about the new house, wearied me; it was like hearing for ever that I was never again to have a home of my own. In the spring, after a long dull winter, my uncle and aunt went to London. I chose to stay in the country; I might have gone with them if I had liked, but I did not like. I knew so well how it would all be; the long talks I should have to listen to about the new house

between Mr. Lester and Lady Helen, and the bitter speeches my aunt would make to every one who came, about my low spirits, and want of proper gratitude towards her and my uncle; I thought it better to be alone than to hear such things as these, so I had that one more spring in the country. I have often been glad about it since; I saw the leaves come out, and pass through all their different shades of green; I watched the spring flowers, and heard the birds sing their first songs in the Penhammon woods; till at last the full summer came—that silent, still part of the summer, when the leaves have left off growing, and the young birds have flown from their nests, and the old ones ceased singing to them. Then I had other things to do and think of, besides watching the changes in the country. But I must not run on too fast; I am forgetting to mention one very important thing that happened in the spring. Algernon Lester spent his Easter in London, and was introduced at last to Lady Helen Vane. I don't think they could have cared much for each other, they were so unlike in every way; but, somehow or other (it was Mr. Lester's influence with them both, perhaps), before Algernon went back to college at the end of the vacation, he and Lady Helen were

engaged. My uncle wrote the news to me. I did not get many letters from him, but this one, I remember, was a very kind and joyful one; he seemed to take it for granted that I should be glad, and that the marriage would be a joyful thing for every one. I believe, dear, now, that if I could have sympathized with my uncle and aunt in their projects and their joys, if I had been unselfish enough, it would have been better for us all, but I could not, my heart was too sore and lonely. Their rejoicing was all strange to me, 'like a song in the night,' as it says somewhere in the Bible. In July they all came home, the Lesters and your father, who was still preparing Algernon for the examination he had to pass in the autumn. I had had many letters from my aunt, sometimes saying they were coming the next day, and then putting it off again. The delay made me nervous, and on the day they did come, I felt as if the bustle of their arrival and the sight of their gay spirits was more than I could bear. Every little thing hurt me, and when my aunt, during dinner, found fault with something I had done, I lost my self-control and burst into tears! My aunt told me, when we got upstairs, that I did it to attract attention and make people pity me; but she was

mistaken—it had never come into my head that any one would pity me, or that I should attract attention."

"But you did, however. I see now what the story is going to be. Your cousin Algernon pitied you, and liked you better than Lady Helen. Oh! do go on."

"Janet, you are too forward in thinking of such things; but perhaps, as this is true, and no story, it may not do you any harm to hear it. It brought no pleasure to me, dear, and if I could have helped it I would not have been the cause of all the anger that came into the house, and of the destruction of their happy plans. Indeed, I was such a child then, that I should never have noticed my cousin Algernon's preference for me, if my aunt's upbraiding and Lady Helen's jealousy and anger had not forced the knowledge upon me. It was a dreadful time. I have no courage to stand up against angry or passionate words. My cousin frightened me when he spoke to me. It all seemed so wrong. My uncle said he would be just, and leave us all to find out our own wishes; but I could see such a cloud of deep displeasure upon his face, that I shrank from him. There was only one person that I could talk to about my troubles, and

he was always just and kind, and ready to shelter me from other people's cruelty or impetuosity. That was your father, Janet. You hardly know him as he was then ; nobody does, I suppose, except me. Well, one day, when things had been going on very badly with me, and when he had heard my aunt upbraiding me cruelly—he asked me to be his wife—not in the strange, wild, frightening way that Algernon used to speak to me in, but so gently, so nobly, telling me at the same time of his father and his mother and his sister, who would be ready to love me and take me into their home. I was very little better than a child then; I hardly knew what it was to be a wife ; but the thought of having a father and a mother again won me at once—it sounded so safe. We settled that it was to be so, and Mr. Scott spoke to my uncle and aunt. I don't know all that passed between them. Mr. Lester was not satisfied at first, but my aunt, who only wanted to get me out of the house, talked him over. So we were engaged with their consent, and poor Algernon left the house very angry with his father and mother, and me, and his friend, and every one.

“A few quiet months followed. My aunt was quite kind to me, and gave me a very handsome wedding

outfit—all that beautiful house-linen, among other things, that I keep for best now. In November your father came again to Tann y Bryn, and one misty morning we were married in our own old church. That was the only time that I ever went back to Morfa, and I can hardly say I saw it then, for the clouds hung so low on the sides of the hills, that I never got the farewell look I had intended to have. Perhaps it was as well. We came to London, and lived, as you know, with Grandpapa and Grandmamma Scott, in that little house in West Street where Hilary was born."

"And you had a home again, and were very happy?" I suggested.

"Yes, I was happy, but the days seemed very long. I was not used to a town. Your father was out all day. He had to work very hard then; for, though there were none of you to be provided for, he had his father and mother to care for. Old Mr. Scott was nearly blind then, and became quite blind before he died. They were very good old people—so good that it puzzled me, for I had never been used to such talk or such a life as theirs. Your Grandmamma Scott used to manage the house. You know what a brisk person she was to the very last. I used

to watch her going about, and to wish that I had as many things to do. I fancied it would make the long monotonous days pass more quickly.

"It did not please God that I should have any children for several years, and Grandmamma Scott used to pity me, and fancy it was that regret that weighed upon my spirits. I don't myself think it was ; for when Hilary came at last—when at last grandmamma came smiling in her happy way to tell me that I was the mother of a strong healthy boy, I did not rejoice as I had thought I should. The recollection came upon me suddenly that my child could never have a childhood like my own—that he would grow up among houses and streets, and never see the sea, or feel the grass under his feet, or hear the sheep-bells on the mountains; and such a longing came over me, not for myself, but for him, that I hid my face in the pillow, and (it was very wicked of me, Janet) I nearly killed myself with crying. Since that hour I have always had it in my heart that Hilary should go back to Morfa."

"But, mamma, we have all been very happy in the town," I said. "I don't think it much signifies where children live. Did Lady Helen and Algernon Lester marry after all?"

"No, my dear, never. Algernon never would believe that his father and mother had behaved fairly by me. I am afraid my marriage set him more than ever against them and their wish. I never heard more of Lady Helen till Charlie mentioned her the other day. I did not like to ask after her in my letters to my uncle and aunt, and her name never occurred in any of theirs to me. She must have been married to Mr. Carr very soon after her engagement to Algernon was broken off, since she has a son old enough to have taken his degree at college; so I hope she was not very unhappy about it."

"Oh! you may be sure she was not," I answered, confidently. "Perhaps Mr. Carr was a very clever man—as clever as his son is now. It must have made her very happy to marry him."

"Perhaps. But, Janet, I don't know that it makes a woman *so very* happy to marry a clever man. When the time comes for you and Nesta to marry, I hope it may not be your lot to have *very* clever men. When a man's mind is full of great things which a woman can't enter into, she has to live alone in her own life, and the little every-day cares fall heavily. I suppose it must be so; but if I could choose for you and Nesta, I should like to see you

marry practical, helpful men, like Hilary, who would be careful over you and over the things in the house—not that I mean to say that it is possible for any one to be better than your father.”

“Oh, no, no, of course not,” I interrupted, but, mamma, tell me something more about Algernon Lester; what did he do when you and Lady Helen were both married?”

“I don’t exactly know, but from what I can make out, he and his father were never reconciled till a few months before his death, which happened a year ago. The grand new house was finished at Morfa, and Mr. and Mrs. Lester went to live in it, but I am afraid they never had much pleasure there; Algernon had vowed that he would never set his foot under their roof again, and he never did—he lived chiefly abroad, spending a great deal of money, and getting into debt, and giving a great deal of trouble to all his friends. At last he married some Italian woman, whom neither his father nor his mother could approve of, or receive into the family. It broke his mother’s heart—or rather, I suppose, wounded her pride so deeply, that she could not bear it. There was always more pride than heart about her. Mr. Lester, I think, really loved his son. When he

heard that Algernon's wife was dead, and that he himself had fallen into bad health, he went to see him in Italy, and they spent the last four months of his life together. Algernon confided his little daughter Rosamond to his father's care, and I believe—so Mr. Lester told us last night—that he expressed great repentance for all his rebellious conduct, and that it was a last wish of his that Mr. Lester should do all he could to make amends to your father and me, for any pain he might have caused us.”

“I wonder Mr. Lester did not come here and tell you all this at once,” I said.

“He did write something of it to your father, but he is a man to whom such a communication would be a hard task. After his son's death, he went and shut himself up at Morfa, occupying himself only with business and the improvement of his estate. I dare say he would not have come up to London for years, if the sight of Hilary's name in the newspaper had not startled him—made him reflect, he says, that he was growing old, and that what he has to do must be done at once. It seems to have made him think, too, about Rosamond's future; he had allowed her to run almost wild, scarcely ever seeing her even, for unhappily she is more like her mother than her

father, and the very sight of her gives him pain, but now he has come to a sudden resolution about her education ; he has determined to renew his friendship with Lady Helen Carr, to whom he says he has always clung in his heart, and to ask her to befriend his poor wild grandchild, and undertake to train her into what she ought to be. She will have a high position to fill in the world, poor child, if she lives, for she will be one of the richest heiresses in England. It is a very different thing owning Morfa now, from what it was in my father's time ; the mines on the estate which he ruined himself in working, yield Mr. Lester an immense income now, and are becoming more valuable every year."

"Will Lady Helen have Rosamond to live with her, then ?" I asked.

"She has invited her to pay her a visit now, and Mr. Lester hopes that Lady Helen will in future stay often at Morfa ; she is a widow with only one grown up son, and not very rich, so she can do as she likes. How little I thought, when I used to hear your father praising young Carr's cleverness, and holding him up as an example to Hilary, that he was Lady Helen's son ! I wonder whether he really *is* so clever ?"

"Shall you ever see Lady Helen again, do you think?"

"Yes; I have promised Mr. Lester to call on Rosamond while she is in London: it will be a great effort to me, but I suppose it is right to make it. It is time that all past coldness and unkindness should be forgotten, and I might possibly be of use to poor Algernon's child. Lady Helen has had a son of her own to be sure, but yet I can't fancy her being very clever in the management of young people, or very kind."

"Mamma, I hope you will take us with you when you go to call; how wonderful it is that all these Morfa people should be just coming about us now!"

"It agitates me very much, for I don't know what may come of it. Now that my uncle has really come forward himself to seek a reconciliation, I don't think your father will feel it his duty to set himself against his desire to be useful to the boys, perhaps after all Hilary may—but stay, I promised your father that he should be the first to mention it. Hilary is to have his choice, and I have promised not to influence him. You must be very careful not to give him any hint till your father has spoken, Janet."

"You have not told me anything yet, mamma," I answered, hoping earnestly to draw her on.

"Have I not? Ah that is fortunate; that is a great relief to my mind; but still you can be as careful as if I had told you."

CHAPTER VII.

"At length, Iduna, looking more narrowly at them, saw, when they turned their backs to her, that they were hollow behind : they were, in truth, Ellewomen, who have no hearts."

Norse Legend.

THE next morning, after breakfast, my father summoned Hilary and Charlie to follow him into his study, as he had something of importance to speak to them about. My father's study was a dark den at the back of the house, chiefly used as a repository for the books, which my much-enduring mother hunted out of the other rooms when the tables were so cumbered with them, that she was moved to take a strong measure to secure a place for her work-basket. The one dusty window looked out on a blank wall, and there was no fire-place; if it had been more habitable, my father would, I fear, have retired to it as soon as ever he entered the house, as

regularly as a snail into its shell. As it was, he contrived to spend an hour or so there on most days, and we young ones regarded the place with a dim religious kind of awe, for in very early times our father had been used to take us there on great occasions, when we had been very good or very naughty. The stubbornest fit of wilfulness never survived a silent *tête-à-tête* with my father in that room. I remember trying in vain to keep up feelings of resentment or childish pride, while my father's serious face, partly turned from me, and a dim light, and a something in the look of the ponderous dusty tomes that lined the walls and usurped the floor, were filling me with a sense of my own insignificance. I must not forget to mention, however, as the most effectual instrument of my subjugation, a large ostrich egg that hung suspended by a long string from the ceiling near the window; we none of us ever knew how it came there. From the time of my first visit to the study, I had confused and terrible ideas about that egg; I thought it had something to do with the roc's egg in the Arabian Nights, and as it hung with the accumulated dust of several years on its upper surface, swaying gently backwards and forwards when my father's steps shook the room, I

eyed it nervously, not at all sure that some unguarded word or wicked thought of mine might not precipitate it suddenly to the ground, and at the same moment bring the house about our ears. I was quite a big girl before I could touch that egg with complete indifference.

It was now some years since any one of us had been summoned to the study, and therefore when Hilary and Charlie remained for the greater part of the morning, closeted with our father, Nesta and I were not a little anxious to hear the result of the conference. They emerged from the study at dinner-time, but Hilary's face looked so grave, and Charlie's so stormy, that we dared not ask any questions, and had to put up with a very silent dinner-hour. Charlie went out for a moody solitary walk in the afternoon. Hilary was occupied writing letters at my father's dictation. I had to wait till the twilight, when I managed to lure Hilary into the old garret with me, before my curiosity was satisfied. Then I learned that in spite of his grave looks, Hilary was pleased with the news he had heard that morning. My father had informed him that he had abandoned all intention of sending him to college, and had accepted a proposition made to him by

Mr. Lester, that Hilary should spend a year or two at Morfa, in the house of Mr. Lester's land-agent, learning farming and land-surveying from him, and making himself acquainted with the management of the Morfa estate. Hilary had always had a secret wish to emigrate, and the prospect of entering on this new line of life attracted him because he thought it afforded him the best chance he was likely to have of preparing himself to carry out this wish at some future day. I could not share his pleasure in this prospect.

"Mamma will never consent to your leaving England," I said, decidedly. "What does she think of Mr. Lester's plan?"

"She is very happy about it. She likes the idea of my living at Morfa, and she has no other thought but that I shall always stay there, and succeed this Mr. Williams in the management of the estate. I really believe, Janet, that would be almost as good to her as our getting Morfa back for our own."

"But not to you."

"No, not to me. I am afraid I should not like to remain all my life another man's servant. I don't know that it would give the place any additional charm to me that it *had* belonged to my ancestors.

I had rather make a place for myself, and begin a new family in a new world. Why not? I suppose those old Wynnes had a beginning at Morfa some time. However, say nothing of all this to my mother. The thought of my settling at Morfa pleases her, and will reconcile her to parting with us both."

"Both! Is Charlie going at once to college then?"

"No, my father thinks him not sufficiently well prepared, and as he must leave the school after gaining the scholarship, my father is going to send him to read with a tutor for a year or so first. He can afford to do that now I am taken off his hands."

"Oh, that accounts for Charlie's looking so savage then?"

"Yes, it is a great disappointment to him; he had so set his heart on going to college at once. I must say I wish the next few weeks were over. Charlie will be horribly out of temper, and my mother will dread the parting more and more every day as it comes nearer."

So should I; but as Hilary did not seem to think of that, I said nothing about it. The parting could not be the same to the boys, who were going out into the world, as to us who were to stay at home.

The next fortnight, certainly, was a dreary time. My mother was actively engaged all day in repairing and replenishing the boys' wardrobes. Her hands were seldom still, except when Hilary was in the room, and then they were very apt to fall listlessly on her lap, while her eyes followed him about, or to remain steadfastly fixed on his face, when he was sitting still. One exciting event occurred, however, which, by changing the current of our thoughts, was serviceable to us all. After many changes of purpose, my mother fixed a day for going to see Rosamond Lester at Lady Helen Carr's house. It had been settled from the first that Charlie and Nesta were to accompany my mother on this occasion. Charlie, because there would have been no peace for any one if he had been left at home, and Nesta, because my mother said she never made her nervous as I did. I was generally glad enough that Nesta should take my place when our mother visited her friends, but my curiosity about the Carrs made me regret for once the effect my presence produced on my mother's visiting nerves.

Nesta took my disappointment and the preference shown to herself very much to heart. Her sweet face looked so wistful when she came down, dressed,

into the hall, that my father, who happened to be just turning into his den, noticed it, and paused, with a book under each arm, to observe us.

"What is the matter with Charlie?" he asked, as the result of the scrutinizing glance he cast from one to another.

There was nothing the matter with Charlie but a new neck-tie, with a crimson stripe in it and fringed ends. My father, who was usually supposed not to know one article of dress from another, showed great curiosity about this, looking at it closely, and even touching it—while Charlie's cheeks rivalled the colour of the silk—and apologizing, finally, by remarking that it struck him, because he thought he had seen a thing like it before in a hairdresser's shop. Then turning round, he remarked, "Nesta looks pale. You do right to take her for a drive. But how is it that you are not ready, Janet? You ought not to keep your mother waiting."

"Janet is not going," interposed my mother, rather nervously.

"Why not?" (in a low voice) "Janet is the elder."

"Yes, I know; but indeed, my dear, it is easy enough for you to say Janet is the elder, but if you did but understand the state my nerves are in, and

the trial it is to me to see Janet's bonnet-strings, you would be more considerate. It is quite too much for me to have to think of Janet's dress, while I am paying a visit."

"Janet is old enough to think of her own dress, and she will never learn to do it, if you don't accustom her to go out with you. She wore a bonnet on Sunday, I believe; if it was fit to wear at church, it is fit for Lady Helen Carr to see. Janet, go and put on your bonnet."

I ran upstairs joyfully, but not without some misgivings, which were happily relieved when I found that Nesta's forethought had taken in the possibility of my mother's relenting towards me. My Sunday bonnet astonished me by coming fresh out of the bandbox. Nesta had transferred the carefully kept ribbons from her bonnet to mine, secure that her own skilful tying would suffice to make my rumpled ones look respectable when they met under her chin. She looked triumphant when I came down in ten minutes, and really seemed to think I deserved the praise my father bestowed on my despatch.

We had a long drive, for the house where Lady Helen resided when in London was situated in a distant suburb. A very dilapidated melancholy house

it looked to us when we reached it. We had to ring several times before our summons was attended to, and then to wait for fully ten minutes in a cold dusty hall till the servant reappeared with the intelligence that Lady Helen Carr was at home and could see us. We followed him up a flight of shabbily carpeted stairs, and were ushered into a small morning room, where a bright wood fire was burning. Before it stood a well-cushioned sofa, from which a lady was in the act of rising when we entered. I concluded that this was Lady Helen Carr, though she was sufficiently unlike the vision I had formed of her to cause me a certain surprise. She looked much older than I had expected, and less imposing. I cannot describe her face, often as I have studied it since. It had no claim to be considered a beautiful, or even a pleasant face, though the broad smooth forehead, just edged with a line of soft brown hair, the penetrating grey eyes, and expressive mouth, where "little smiles went out and in," made it one not easy to overlook or forget. She came forward to my mother holding out both hands, and led her to the sofa without speaking; even after they were seated, side by side, a moment's silence followed. Lady Helen spoke first. Bending her head slowly

forward, and pressing the two hands she still held, she said, softly,

“How long it is since we two last met! During your last summer at Tann y Bryn, was it not? Let me see; how long ago?”

My mother was not prepared for such a sudden reference to events of which, she at least, had not outlived the pain; a sudden rush of blood crimsoned her fair face, her lip trembled, and her eyes, raised to Lady Helen's face, filled with tears. I thought her silence and confusion would embarrass Lady Helen, but it was not so; she returned my mother's glance, and her own eyes grew small and intensely bright, and one of the “little smiles” flickered in and out on her thin lips. It was a curious look; such as I have seen on the face of a school-boy as he watches with interest, and not the least sympathy, the contortions of a butterfly through whose body he has stuck a pin. It came and went in an instant; Lady Helen released my mother's hands, and completed her sentence in a now really gracious and cordial manner.

“Long, yes, *I* may call it long; but when I look at you, I begin to fancy that I am mistaken, and that I have been counting days for years. You are

not altered ; you hardly look a day older than when I last saw you. I wish you would give me your secret ; I wish you could explain to me how you have managed to live so many years in the world and to look just the same beautiful child that you were when we first met."

My mother had recovered herself now, and at the words " beautiful child " she drew up her head, and glanced at us with a little gesture of offended maternal dignity.

" I have brought my children to see you, Lady Helen," she said.

" Your children ! Well, then, I am right in my chronology after all. Is this indeed your daughter ? She looks older than you do."

" Yes, that is Janet, my eldest daughter. My eldest child is a son, Hilary Wynne, named after my dear father ; he is eighteen. That is my second son Charlie, over sixteen ; and that is Ernestine, my youngest."

Charlie and Ernestine, who had been standing a little behind me, now came forward. Lady Helen looked from one to another with undisguised admiration ; a faint flush of colour came into her sallow cheek, and the little smile with which she turned to

my mother did not hide a shade of vexation, if not of sadness.

"Ah! you have some malice in you after all," she said. "You know what an absurd adoration I have always had for beauty, and you rouse all the envy in my nature, by bringing me such a sight as this. No, my dear Mrs. Scott, you need not shake your head. I always say exactly what I think of people's looks. If Miss Ernestine (is not that the name?) has not got hardened yet to being called a beauty, it is high time that I should begin the process. See! she does not colour even. What a self-possessed, well-bred lady of the world she is! Both your daughters are older than you, Mrs. Scott. They leave consciousness and blushes to the young gentleman."

Ernestine did not colour; it was not her habit to colour under observation; she grew pale and shrank into herself, hiding away her charms—the pretty blushes, and quick bright glances and smiles that came when no one was watching for them, as a sensitive plant folds inwards the bright side of its delicate leaves. I was not surprised that Lady Helen's eye turned from her face to Charlie's, and rested there.

"Is your eldest son like this one?" she asked.

"No, Hilary and Charlie are never considered alike. I think Hilary is most like Janet."

This second mention of my name brought on me a more considering look than I had yet undergone. Lady Helen's lips did not say "What a pity!" but only the words were wanting. "A sensible face," she remarked to my mother, speaking of me as if I had been a picture, or deaf and dumb. "Well, we cannot all be alike, and a sensible, well-informed, useful girl, is always liked and valued."

"H'm!" said my mother, "but unfortunately it is Ernestine who is the most useful; she is the sensible one."

"Oh, that will never do! My dear Mrs. Scott, daughterless as I am, you will have to come to me to be instructed. I assure you, you must be decided about your eldest daughter's line; there is no other for her to take, and you must not let her be deprived of it. She must not attempt to be witty and *spirituelle*; she is too large, and does not move easily enough. She and I will talk it over together some day. If people only would make up their minds about themselves, and act consistently, there is really hardly any one who might not be made something of."

The last remark was not addressed to any one, and

my mother not being much pleased with the turn the conversation had taken, introduced a fresh topic. "You have a son older than either of mine, I have heard?" she said.

"Older indeed! but, my dear Mrs. Scott, you are touching on a tender subject. I do not consider myself young—I neither look young, nor feel young; but really when I look at my son, and hear him and his friends converse together, I am inclined to revolt against the antiquity they thrust upon me. For the last ten years, I assure you, I have felt it necessary to pay greater respect to my son, on account of his age, than I ever paid my father. He is *wonderfully* old, and he has convinced me that it is only the young people of this generation who know how to be old."

"Your son is very clever, is he not?" my mother gently interposed.

"Some people, himself among the number, think so. He is not with me now, and if he were, I don't think I should send for him for you to look at; he does not bear looking at as well as your children do. Stay though! I may as well prepare you for what you will have to see some day; that is his likeness above the chimney-piece; it will give you a good idea of what he is. Ugly *sans façon*! It is my style of

ugliness, you will observe, that he has inherited, not his father's ; I am rather glad of that, for it is the less common style of the two. Shafto and I comfort ourselves sometimes by observing that at all events we have it to ourselves."

We all turned to look at the picture Lady Helen pointed out ; it was a full-length portrait, and it impressed you at once with a conviction that it must be a perfect likeness ; the attitude was so easy, the expression of the face so individual and striking. There was enough likeness in the face to Lady Helen's to justify her remark ; there was the same colourless complexion, the same heavy droop of the eyelids, the same want of regularity of feature ; yet as I gazed from one to the other, I felt that I liked the pictured face the best. It was an old-young face ; perhaps it was the contrast between the smooth cheek and brow, and the grave, almost melancholy expression of eyes, that interested me.

"Well !" said Lady Helen, turning with a playful smile to my mother, "where is your look of triumph over me ? I know you must be feeling triumphant ; only one child against your four, and such an ugly one ! cannot you think of something comforting to say to me ?—you always were a kind creature."

"I am sure," answered my mother, hesitatingly, "I never thought of being proud; I have always said that I did not care at all about looks, and your son's seems to be a very nice—"

"No, my dear Mrs. Scott—pardon me, but I cannot have that said—not a *nice face*: Shafto and I stand upon our ugliness; we really cannot give up that. If we could have been beautiful, well; if not, to be downright ugly is still something, but to be tolerable looking, *nice-looking*, no! I will stand up for Shafto; he does not deserve such a reproach as that. I have handed him down the Denbigh face unmitigated, sneer and all, and I think the artist has done it justice."

My mother, utterly discomfited, escaped answering this remark by asking to see Rosamond Lester, who had not yet made her appearance. Lady Helen glanced round the room, and seeing no one, remarked, "Ah! she has slipped away again, probably the instant you were announced; she is an extraordinarily unsociable child, I can make nothing of her. I believe she positively hates me, and that it is pain to her to be in the same room with me, yet I do all I can to please her, for my kind friend, Mr. Lester's sake. She has been sadly neglected. She puts me in mind of German stories of wild children, who

have been lost in forests in their infancy, and grown up among wild beasts. I begin to repent that I have undertaken the task of training her. I should like you to see her, however, for I want your opinion of her state of health; you know more about children than I do. If you will come with me, we will take her by storm in her retreat upstairs." Lady Helen rose from her seat as she spoke, and my mother followed her to the door; when they reached it, she turned and looked at us.

"Will not you come too? it will perhaps interest her to see other children."

Nesta and I complied; Charlie turned to the table, and took up a book. Lady Helen, drawing a shawl over her rather high thin shoulders, made a remark about the coldness of the passages, and her extreme dislike to every part of the house but her own snug-gery, as she led us up a second wide flight of stairs. My mother's eyes, glancing here and there, were observant, as I plainly perceived, of dust and cob-webs.

"Here we are," Lady Helen said, at last, throwing open the door of a room, and entering quickly. "Rosamond, I have brought you some visitors."

It was a large, low room, with old nursery

furniture in it. A table in the middle was loaded with books and toys ; they looked as if they had been just thrown down upon it and left. The window was wide open, and kneeling before it was Rosamond Lester. Her hands, stretched above her head, held the uppermost of a row of iron bars which protected the window, and her face was pressed between the two middle ones, which just caught her forehead and chin.

"Rosamond, my dear child, I have brought some friends to see you," Lady Helen repeated, in a voice which, in spite of its gentleness, expressed abundant disgust and vexation. No answer came, and with a shrug of her shoulders she walked up to the table. "You see what pains I take to please her," she said, touching the toys and books. "Look round, Miss Ernestine, and tell me whether you do not think there is employment and amusement here for a girl of her age, more satisfactory than rebelling against the bars of that unfortunate window."

Nesta looked as she was told, and then said timidly, "I think " (glancing pitifully at the figure in the window)—"I think she is too old to care for toys or books like these."

"You do? I am glad you have told me so. I

feel at a loss to know what girls do care for, for I believe I never was like other girls myself. Think over all your occupations, and tell me what gives you most pleasure."

Nesta hesitated, and Lady Helen added a "Well, my dear?" with a look that reminded me of Charlie's saying about Mr. Carr's eyes drawing the answers out of him.

"Hearing Janet talk," said Nesta, at last.

"Ah," interposed my mother, "living in a town, as we do, without a garden, or so much as a tree near us, the poor child has no pleasures."

"Oh, I have Janet," said Nesta.

"So you can suggest nothing but Janet? Well, perhaps companionship may be what Rosamond wants. I wish I had thought of that before she became so heavy and languid. Mrs. Scott, do you think you could spare me your daughters for a week or so, till the governess I have engaged for Rosamond arrives, or till we return to Morfa? I would do my best to make them happy, and Mr. Lester would be very grateful to you."

Before my mother could answer, a gruff voice from the other end of the room interrupted our talk. Rosamond had risen from her knees, and partly turned

round, though with one hand still nervously clutching the bars of the window. "I don't want them," she said; "don't bring them here. I won't speak to them if they do come."

"There! you see how strange she is!" exclaimed Lady Helen—"so wilfully unsociable. Nothing I propose to do pleases her. What shall I do with her?"

I did not hear my mother's whispered answer. The next instant she had crossed the room to the window, succeeded in unclasping Rosamond's hand from the bar, and in persuading her to take a chair near one in which she placed herself. Then she began to talk to her, asking minute questions about well-remembered and well-loved spots in the neighbourhood of Morfa; the sheltered wood behind the house, where the first violets came out; the low meadow famous for mushrooms, the wide common, where cranberries might sometimes be gathered. Rosamond stood still to listen, then raised her eyes confidently to my mother's face—at last vouchsafed a word or two of answer. "Yes, she had walked through that wood; she knew the common, and one day she had found some sour red berries growing on a low bush. If she had known that my mother cared

so much for them, she would have looked for some for her." Her face grew quite gentle as she said this, and she nestled close up to my mother's side. I fancied Lady Helen was not quite pleased to see how easily my mother won Rosamond's confidence. She interrupted the conversation rather sharply once or twice, and when my mother, on rising to take leave, invited Rosamond to come and spend a day with us, she demurred about accepting the invitation. "My mother was too kind," she said; "but she did not know—she was not fond of making promises. If she had a day to spare before she left London she would bring her to see us, but she was disposed to think she should not remain many days longer in London. She should perhaps write to Mr. Lester that afternoon, and fix the time for her visit to Morfa."

When the last "good-byes" came to be spoken, however, Lady Helen grew gracious again. She even followed us downstairs, with kind pretty speeches to Nesta and Charlie, and cordially expressed hopes that she and my mother should, somehow or other, somewhere, meet again.

"Which is the *real* Lady Helen, mamma?" I asked, when we had taken our places in the carriage; "which is the Lady Helen who used to sit in the

little summer parlour at Tann y Bryn, and talk to Mr. Lester—the smiling one, or the sneering one? If you had much of the sneering one, I don't wonder at your cousin Algernon——”

“Janet, how can you?” my mother cried. “I am sure the way in which you talk is a lesson against ever telling you anything again.”

I subsided immediately, but in spite of my discomfiture we had plenty of talk during our ride home. Charlie had much to say about the number of books he had discovered, in various parts of the room, while we were upstairs, and my mother was much shocked and scandalized by his description of their expensive bindings. “She could not conceive,” she said, “how a woman, who might do just as she liked with her money, could be so lost to all womanly feeling as to spend it in buying useless books, while all the furniture in her house was in such an unsatisfactory state.”

My mother had caught her foot in a large hole in the stair-carpet, she informed us, and counted five ink-stains on the cloth that covered the table. Well, it was a lesson. No station was without its trials, and there might be unexpected ones everywhere. Lady Helen's present home was a greater

contrast to Denbigh Castle than our little house to Morfa.

"Were the Denbighs rich?" I asked.

My mother said she believed not; she remembered to have heard that Lord Denbigh's son had been very extravagant, and that the daughters were slenderly portioned.

"But that would have made no difference in Mr. Lester's wishes. Oh, dear!" cried my mother, suddenly; "to think that she *might* have had that great house at Morfa now. What a contrast! I wish I dare have said something to her about being sorry. Janet, please do not repeat what you said just now, about her sneering; and I think, children, it would perhaps be considerate in us if we never mentioned the state of her stair-carpet to any one. I certainly shall not tell Mrs. Wilton, though she will, I have no doubt, come in this afternoon to hear all about our visit; and she would be very much surprised, indeed, if I did mention it to her."

My mother kept her resolution, and was guarded in her narrative of our visit, even to my father and Hilary, but we younger ones supplied all the missing details. I fancy that my father was quite weary of the subject before the day was over; for he checked

Charlie and me ~~rather impatiently~~, in a dispute we were carrying on ~~concerning~~ ~~supper~~ about a resemblance, on which I insisted, between Lady Helen and Christabel's mysterious guest.

"He would not have any more nonsense talked," he said. "Charlie's and my arguments were a nuisance to the whole family; it was perhaps as well that we should not have opportunity for many more."

That was in fact the last of our arguments, for, very soon after, came a letter from Mr. Williams, fixing an early day for Hilary's arrival at Morfa. And as Charlie's future tutor lived in Shropshire; it was settled that the two boys should leave us on the same day, and make the greater part of their journey together.

My mother's habit of never leaving anything to be done at the last, stood her in good stead. Yet when the last day came, it seemed as if we had everything to do. My mother kept all her tears till the bustle was over; Nesta and I were obliged to let her work, and to weary ourselves by standing about, watching her; for she would have felt aggrieved, if any of the last offices performed for the boys had been rendered by any hands but hers.

She was downstairs first on the morning of departure; and care about providing thoroughly hot

coffee and toast occupied her till the last moment. Hilary eat and drank, and helped my mother dexterously with the tea-urn, just as he had done every other morning of his life. Charlie, who had hitherto betrayed what Nesta considered stony-hearted indifference about the approaching separation, broke down utterly just at the last ; he came downstairs pale-faced and red-eyed, choked desperately over every morsel of toast, and could hardly bring himself to stir from my father's side. When the cab came to the door he missed his keys, and we all had a frantic search for them up and down the house. This accident curtailed some last words of counsel that my father had wished to give, but it also shortened my mother's clinging painful embrace of Hilary ; and that was perhaps as well for both of them.

At last they were gone ; the rattle of the cab-wheels died away along the street, and silence seemed to come down upon the whole house. We four who were left in it, sat looking blankly at each other for some minutes, and then my father walked off and shut himself up in his den ; and my mother, after putting the breakfast-cups together for the servant to take away, retired also to her room, where we heard her lock herself in. Nesta and I got our work, and sat

in the window seat ; we had a solemn sort of feeling upon us, as if it were Sunday, and we spoke in whispers. We understood why our father and mother had shut themselves up. The objects of their constant daily care and thought were speeding away, out of the reach of the wise guidance of the one—the tender watching of the other : what could they do, but send out their hearts after them in petitions to Heaven for their welfare ?

I have often thought how strange it would be, if some sudden spiritualizing of our powers of vision could enable us to *see* the wishes, hopes, cares, anxiety, love, that wait on each person in a company—if they took the form of robes of various degrees of richness and beauty, for instance—how suddenly we might have to change our estimates of a person's importance and worth. This is an idle fancy, but I remember it came to me on that morning, as I thought of my brothers taking their first flight out of the family ark, which was never again to be their only home ; and of my father and mother shut up with anxious hearts, praying for them.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ And we wake to a whisper, self-murmured and fond,

Oh Life ! oh Beyond !

Thou art strange, thou art sweet ! ”

E. B. BROWNING.

LOOKING at my life as a journey, my next four years appear to me to have been spent in a narrow, shady, upward-sloping green lane, pleasant to look down, when one has reached the top, but somewhat monotonous to linger long in. We were a very quiet little household when the boys had left us ; we ought to have been a very happy one ; and I take shame to my own restless disposition that I was not entirely contented and happy.

I must confess that I had a somewhat turbulent and uncomfortable passage from girlhood to womanhood. I quarrelled with my teachers, argued with my companions, and, I fear, made myself generally disagree-

able in the house. My dear mother used to be in despair about me sometimes, and would even now and then terrify me by giving it as her opinion that I never should be like other people, and that she did not see what was to become of me. Only my father had patience with me, and encouraged me not to despair of myself. It was an uncomfortable and painful growing up; but the days and months passed, and the process went on.

On my eighteenth birthday I remember I felt very old. I thought I had gone through a great deal, and been disabused of many illusions, and I also hoped that I had succeeded in curing myself of my most obvious faults; my mother had begun to consider me more trustworthy, and my father had ceased to be anxious about what I might say in company. I had learned not to startle old gentlemen and young ladies, by abruptly asking their opinion about free-will or the origin of evil; and I had left off forcing my intimate friends to enter upon long-winded discussions at inconvenient times.

For the last three months Mr. Armstrong (Hilary's old friend), who had been at one time my most constant opponent in the recondite arguments I was fond of starting, had found it difficult to draw me

into one, even when he had felt disposed to enter upon the old amusement. Now that I was really a grown-up woman, I promised myself that neither he nor any one else should entertain themselves at my expense.

When I had finished dressing on that morning, I lingered for a minute before the glass, and congratulated myself that, in spite of my mother's predictions that I should never be like other people, there was, at least, no Cain mark of separation on my face. I had no pretension to beauty, or even to prettiness, but I could not help thinking with some satisfaction, that I looked at least as well as most people, perhaps even a little better than some. My teeth had justified my father's wisdom in forbidding any interference with them, by falling into their right places of their own accord. Being very white and even, they somewhat atoned for the large size of my mouth, over which I had heard my mother lament. My complexion was as dark as ever, but sometimes my cheeks assumed a tinge of colour, and then Nesta would triumphantly declare that I looked quite handsome ; I did not believe this, but I did not contradict her, for she found a marvellous satisfaction in the saying.

Just as I had finished my inspection of myself, and turned from the glass to the door, Nesta entered with a bunch of spring flowers in her hand, to buy which she had been out in the chill March morning.

"Oh! I am so glad you have not gone downstairs yet," she said, "I wanted to be the first to speak to you this morning; I have always been the first to speak to you on your birthday morning, and I always mean to be." Coming up to me, she threw her arms round my neck, and looked up at me with the fond admiring look in her brown eyes, which I had been used to see so long, that it came almost as due homage to me from my little sister.

Nesta had not grown up quite as beautiful as she had promised to be in her childhood; at seventeen she was still extremely small, and childish-looking; her cheeks were still almost transparently pale; her small delicately formed mouth wore often a dejected expression; her long dark eyelashes still seemed too heavy for the white lids to hold up. She looked like a very rare and precious flower, that had failed to expand all its charms for want of due warmth and sunlight. Now and then, however, a temporary transformation would take place in her,

and she would become for an hour or two wonderfully beautiful. I had noticed this change come over her sometimes, when she was singing alone in the room with me, but it came oftenest, and lasted longest, when Charlie was at home; then a spirit of frolic seemed to take possession of Nesta, and her usual tender seriousness gave place to a kind of airy gaiety. I never could follow either her or Charlie when they were in their happiest moods; their catch words were unintelligible to me, their playfulness unmeaning. My father used to smile, and even laugh aloud, at their vagaries, while I knit my brows in bewilderment.

"*You* are not old enough to enter into this, Janet," he used to say to me compassionately, when he saw how disconcerted I was; "but never mind, you will work your way into the play spirit some day, as you are not born to it; you will have to wait to be young till you are old."

When Nesta had admired me to her heart's content, she amused herself by arranging the flowers she had brought in my hair.

"You have grown in this last year, Janet," she said, "more than I have; I had not to stand on tip-toe last year, when I put a bunch of birthday flowers

in your hair. Do turn to the glass, and see how pretty the white snowdrops and the blue nemophilæ look in your dear brown hair—they are you and me; I am the snowdrops, and you are the blue—Nay! don't twitch your head away; I was not meaning what you are thinking just now; I had forgotten how odious Mrs. Wilton has made that word to you, with her eternal 'So I understand that you are becoming quite a blue, Miss Janet; we are all afraid of you.'"

Nesta had the power of giving the precise accent and tone of any one whose words she repeated. I always declared that there was nothing really laughable in this, but I never could help laughing when Mrs. Wilton's obnoxious voice and words came from Nesta's lips.

"Now you are to stand still," Nesta continued, "I want to try this belt round your waist; it is the one Rosamond Lester made Hilary send to us for a pattern. Ah! it is too large for you. You see your waist is more slender than Rosamond Lester's, and yet every one says what a lovely figure she has."

"Fine, not lovely," I corrected.

"Janet, you must help me to persuade mamma to go with us to-day, and choose the ribbons Rosamond

wants. Hilary does not like us to be long executing a commission for Miss Lester."

"How strange it is in her to trouble Hilary with such foolish little commissions," I remarked.

"Shall I tell you what I feel sure is always happening at Morfa, when Rosamond sends us a commission?"

"How can you know what is happening at Morfa?"

"I know that Lady Helen Carr is staying there, and that she and Rosamond have had a quarrel."

"But, my dear, why should Rosamond's quarrelling with Lady Helen Carr make her want ribbons?"

"It does not, O stupid Janet; but if you had listened to the letters Charlie wrote from Morfa last Christmas as attentively as I did, you would understand my hint. Did not you learn from them that Lady Helen Carr hates Hilary, and that Rosamond knows no better way of plaguing her than by making an unusually open display of her intimacy with him?"

"That is one of Charlie's fancies," I answered. "He always will insist on knowing more of people's likes and dislikes than they know themselves. Hilary has far too much dignity to allow himself to be made a subject of quarrel."

"Yes, if he knew that people were quarrelling about him ; but, Janet, don't you know Hilary ? All sorts of manœuvres and petty quarrels might pass before his eyes without his seeing them. He will tell you what kind of earth there is on every field for twenty miles round Morfa, but I don't believe he knows that his cousin Rosamond has changed from a little girl to a grown-up young lady. He has so much to say about the country that he quite forgets the people who live in it."

"His descriptions of the country are what mamma delights in," I observed. "There is sure to be a letter from him to-day. Let us go downstairs and get it."

I paused on my way to the breakfast-room, to tap at the little study-door, and summon my father. I now usually found him at this hour pacing up and down the narrow space between the writing-desk and the rows of dusty volumes which occupied half the floor. The lapse of a few years does not alter middle-aged people as it alters the young. Yet the last four years had wrought one very noticeable change in my father—a change which indifferent persons could not fail to perceive, but which we, who lived with him, only acknowledged with sudden pangs of misgiving

now and then. A certain expression that we had been used to see at times in his eyes, had become fixed there. I don't know how to describe it; I never saw it in any eyes but his. It was an inward look—a look of rest; there were none of the old quick glancings up and down—the painful efforts to see, which in past times had somewhat disfigured his countenance. The eyelids, now always well opened and still, showed fully the calm expression of the beautiful brown irids. My mind misgave me that this expression of inward calm remained so fixed in them, because every day a less vivid perception of outward things disturbed it. My father, however, had never said a word to any one about any failure of sight, and excepting that he read and wrote less, and was more and more thankful for the support of Mr. Armstrong's arm to and from the school, there was little alteration in his daily habits. I don't think my mother ever felt at all uneasy about him.

When my father and I entered the breakfast-room together, we found Nesta making the tea, and my mother sitting by the fire, in a high state of enjoyment; for she held a closely written sheet of paper in her hand, and two others lay on the mantel-shelf beside her. No one but Hilary ever wrote such

letters. My mother lived through them a sort of double life—half with Hilary at Morfa, only half in London with us. She knew his hours of walking, the routine of his rides; she knew what crops were growing on the lowland meadows, and the names of the farmers who rented the steep pasturage of the mountain sides; she was interested in the well-being of the flocks that fed there. She recollected every lone cottage among the hills that Hilary described himself as visiting, and was eager for details of their present inhabitants. Every name recalled some incident of her early happy days.

She cut short her birthday greeting to me to claim our interest in what she had been reading. "Oh, Janet," she said, "think of Mr. Lester's wanting to pull down the old farm-house at Cae-Mawr, and to build a new brick house further from the lake. He thinks the present situation damp I suppose. I can't make out from this letter what Hilary's opinion is. I fancy he is disposed to have the old house put into repair, and the land drained. I hope Mr. Lester will decide on doing this. I could not bear to lose the old house. There used to be such a pear-tree growing over the south gable, and I have

gathered monthly roses from the porch in January. I must write to Hilary to-day about it."

"Does Hilary say how Mr. Williams is?" my father asked.

"No better. Hilary begins to think he will never recover from the effects of his fall last autumn. His illness throws a great deal of work on Hilary. He is really doing all the agent's work, with a very small share of the pay."

"Nay!" my father answered; "Mr. Lester has been very liberal. Hilary would not be in the position he holds, if he were not acting as Mr. Williams' substitute."

"I believe Mr. Lester has more confidence in Hilary than he ever had in Mr. Williams," I remarked proudly. "Charlie says Mr. Lester never settles anything now without asking Hilary's opinion first."

"Well, well," said my father impatiently, "so long as Hilary's head is not turned."

"Oh! papa," I answered laughing, "anxiety about Hilary's head is quite thrown away; I don't believe he is ever in a hurry even. Look at his letters; there are three to-day—mamma's long letter, and shorter ones for Nesta and me."

I had been turning over a heap of still unopened letters as I spoke: there were four—two directed in Hilary's handwriting, one from Lady Helen Carr, the third had its face turned to the table; my father took it up, and held it close to his eyes. "Is not this from Charlie?" he said rather quickly; "open it, Janet. Did you know that there was a letter from Charlie, my dear?" (to my mother).

"Yes, I saw it, but I put it aside till I had read Hilary's. Charlie's letters are always so short and unsatisfactory. You had better read it aloud now, Janet."

Comparisons between Charlie's and Hilary's letters were always painful. My first glance showed me that the letter I held was no longer than the majority of its predecessors, and, expecting a string of common-place excuses for not writing, I prepared myself reluctantly to read.

"There can be no news about the scholarship yet," my father remarked, "for the examination was not to begin till yesterday; but perhaps he will tell us how he got through the first day's trial. Let us hear, Janet."

"'Dearest Mother,'" I read, "'will you be glad to hear that I am coming home to-morrow evening? I

know you don't like surprises, but, as the letters reach you early, and as I shall not be in London till ten o'clock at night, I think the intervening hours will be time enough for you and Nesta to tire yourselves in making ready for me. Give my love to my father, and tell him that I hope he won't be disappointed to hear that I have given up all thought of trying for the Craven Scholarship. I did not go into the schools to-day. I will explain my reason for this change of purpose when we meet. Love to the girls.—Your affectionate CHARLIE.

“‘P. S. I have not been very well lately, but what has determined me against going in for the scholarship is that one of the examiners is a detestable old fogey to whom I have a special aversion. The fact of having to be examined by him would have entirely prevented my doing myself justice.’”

“Not going to try for the scholarship!” cried my father.

“Coming home to-night, without giving us time to air his bed!” exclaimed my mother, and then an ominous silence fell on the group assembled round the breakfast-table. Once or twice before, Charlie's short letters had brought down such silences. My mother, refusing all Nesta's pressing offers of tea and toast,

sat looking at my father. My father took his breakfast as usual, but his face settled into the stern gravity which we used to call the "school look," and the veins in his large forehead swelled till I could trace the course of each throbbing blue line. No one spoke till the meal was over and my father rose to leave the room; then my mother took up Charlie's letter, and glancing down it, remarked in a faltering voice, "He says he has not been very well lately."

My father, who had reached the door, turned back and stood behind my mother's chair.

"We shall be glad to see poor Charlie," she continued. "It is more than a year since we have seen him. I don't think we need make any difficulty about the bed; I always keep the beds well-aired, and I will have a fire lighted in his room directly."

It was in the same tone of voice, and with gentle irrelevant remarks of the same nature, that my mother had been wont to try in old times to avert my father's displeasure when she feared that it was impending over the boys. We had always considered it a good sign when he stood still to listen to her. Nesta thought so well of his attention now, that she ventured to insinuate two little hands into one of his, and whisper, "You are not angry with Charlie, papa?"

“ Angry ! ” There was a pause, and my father’s voice, which had sounded harshly, took a deeper tone. “ I don’t know yet, Nesta, how much of what I am feeling now is anger for the disappointment to my own pride ; how much just displeasure at my poor boy’s folly. Let me go, Nesta. Let me go, dear love ; before evening I shall have found out. It is well that the post comes in early, and that he will arrive late ; you will have time for your preparations to receive him rightly, and I for mine.”

He left us and retired to the den ; and my mother, after giving Nesta permission to open and read Lady Helen Carr’s letter, went up to her own room. I had then leisure to open Hilary’s letter to me. It was a pleasant letter for a sister to receive from a brother on her birthday ; it showed so plainly that he had been thinking of me ; it was full of allusions to past birthdays of mine and his—childish pleasures, childish jokes, which even I had forgotten, and which could only have lingered in a heart as faithful and true to home memories as Hilary’s. Ernestine had finished reading her two letters, when I looked up from mine. With a mischievous smile on her face, she handed me Hilary’s note first. The paper contained only a few lines :—

"DEAR NESTA,—If you have not procured the waistbands for which I gave you a commission, don't get them. Miss Lester has changed her mind; she says she can buy what she wants at Bangor, and prefers not to trouble either you or me. In haste—the letters are gone, I shall have to send an express with this. I would not have the belts sent to Miss Lester now on *any* account. Keep them for yourself if they are bought—I will pay for them.

"Yours,

"HILARY."

"Much ado about nothing," was my comment on the epistle.

"More ado about nothing," Nesta laughed, handing me Lady Helen's.

I retired with it to the window, and knit my brows. Lady Helen's letters were always a puzzle to me—it was a puzzle why she kept up a correspondence with us at all. Her letter of that morning began with an account of her reception at Morfa, where she had been staying a fortnight, when she began to write. A few of her words called up a picture such as all Hilary's carefully exact descriptions of the same scenes had failed to give. As I read, I approached with her to

the new great house of Morfa Mawr. I saw the broad road cut in the side of a thickly wooded hill, the rapid descent into the valley, the down-sloping avenue, and then the gleaming white mansion whose stately terraced pleasure grounds and "ordered gardens great," turned the once sterile valley among the hills into a wonder of cultivation. Best of all, however, I saw the figures that gave life to Lady Helen's picture—Mr. Lester standing midway on the lofty flight of marble steps that led to the door, his white head bare, his cheeks flushed with excitement, both hands held out eagerly to welcome his guest; and at the top, withdrawn into the shade of the doorway, Rosamond Lester, a tall lithe figure, a riding-cap shading her black brows and almost fierce-looking eyes (my fancy said fierce, Lady Helen's letter said strangely bright)—one hand gathered together the folds of her riding-habit, the other played with her whip; there was no hand ready for Lady Helen, but a cold smooth cheek, exquisitely coloured, was negligently turned to receive her kiss. A long interval appeared to have passed between the writing of the commencement and the conclusion of the letter. I remember the exact words of the latter part, for they referred to Hilary.

"During these weeks I have seen much of your son Hilary," Lady Helen wrote. "Ah! my dear Mrs. Scott, now you are interested, now you hold my paper firmly; you have found what you have waded through all this preamble to seek. Well, you are right to prize this son of yours; even I can acknowledge that he is a son for a mother to rest on, and be proud of. He has great influence with every one here. I fancy he owes it to a certain singleness of character which favourably affects people like Mr. Lester and Rosamond, who are always quarrelling with each other and with themselves. It is a dangerous gift, this power of gaining influence; I don't say your son will find it so, but I drop a word as a warning. Young people are fond of power, and elderly people, even when they have wills as strong as Mr. Lester's, submit sometimes to self-imposed authority, till some unexpected disagreement causes them to feel its restraint. I don't know a position which calls for the exercise of greater tact and good sense, than that in which your son stands towards his relatives at Morfa Mawr. Don't be alarmed, however; he has so very much good sense, that the tact he has not may in his case perhaps be dispensed with. Having spoken so long of *your* son, I may now say a word about *mine*. I have heard from him this morning.

He returns to England from his long sojourn in the East next Thursday, and purposes to join me here. I have written to urge his doing so, and yet I mean to leave Morfa on the morning of the day on which he will reach it. You don't believe me; the very idea of such an unnatural proceeding makes your maternal hair stand on end; but such is my intention, and I mean to keep it. That you may not think me quite a monster, I will explain my reason for acting in this way. I wish Mr. Lester to know and like my son, now that he is a grown-up man and worth knowing; and I think this end will be best attained by my keeping out of the way during their first interview. Both are so reserved, that they will never really find each other out, if I am there to interpret between them. I shall go to London for a few months, and look up my old friends. Your house will be one of the first at which I shall call.

“Yours faithfully,

“HELEN CARR.”

“What a strange reason Lady Helen gives for leaving Morfa,” I observed, as I returned the letter to Nesta. “Why should she care so very much what opinion Mr. Lester forms of her son?”

"There are other people at Morfa besides Mr. Lester," said Ernestine, demurely.

"Rosamond!" I exclaimed. "Nesta, how clever you are. Yes, I see. I *can* understand why Lady Helen should covet *her* good opinion for her son, and why she should feel that he is more likely to gain it if she keeps out of the way. Rosamond has always disliked Lady Helen, but she may get to like Mr. Carr. If she did—if they became attached to each other—how happy Lady Helen and Mr. Lester would be. It would make up for the old disappointment, and really be a beautiful end to the history."

"Only it has not begun yet," said Nesta. "And it is after all only a guess of mine, that Lady Helen has such a thought in her head. So don't let us say any more about it."

CHAPTER IX.

“ Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.”

It had become such a settled custom that Nesta was to be my mother's helper in all domestic affairs, that I had no opportunity of judging how her preparations for receiving Charlie went on during the day. But when my father came to me in the evening to receive the notes for his lecture, which it was my business to write out legibly for him in large text-hand, I gathered from my first glance at his face that his preparations, of whatever nature they had been, had brought back tranquillity and gentle feeling.

“ So, Janet,” he said, while I was busy arranging his notes and books of reference in his coat-pockets, “ your birthday will be kept ; you will have a guest after all.”

There had been some talk between Nesta, my

mother, and Mr. Armstrong, of giving a party to celebrate my eighteenth birthday, but I had stoutly resisted the notion.

"Oh, papa," I said—"I might be glad. If it were a happy home-coming I should wish for nothing better to celebrate my birthday."

"Let it be happy," my father said, gently; "only something very bad indeed should cloud a home-coming. I remember I could never enjoy a welcome I had not earned: but perhaps it is well sometimes to give what is not earned."

"I wonder how Charlie can bear to disappoint you," I exclaimed. "Oh, papa, shall you mind very much the sort of fuss there will be among our friends—the questions they will ask about Charlie's success in the examination, and the surprise they will put on?"

"No, not *very* much; not as much as you will. If it were only that our family vanity had to suffer, it would signify little. I must be tolerant, Janet, for fear of being too hard. I find I have been transferring my own starved-out ambition to him. How deceitful our hearts are! I thought my longing for worldly success had been killed long since. I am afraid it has still another death to die."

A quick knock at the door here interrupted our conversation, and put an end to the happiest part of my day, when I had my father all to myself. Mr. Armstrong had called to walk with him to the lecture-room. His careful guidance was a comfort to my father, for which I was daily growing more thankful. The least I could do was to take care that my father should never keep him waiting a moment through any fault of mine.

That evening I half expected a quick step on the stairs to follow the knock at the door. A year ago, on the same day, Mr. Armstrong had remembered my birthday, and found something to say to me about it. I had quarrelled with his congratulations at the time; I should probably have done so again if they had been repeated, and yet I felt a little blank when no one appeared, and I had to go to the head of the stairs to light my father down. It is, after all, pleasant to have *any* one remember one's birthday.

The feeling of disappointment did not last long. My thoughts soon reverted to what my father had said to me; and I began to walk up and down the dining-room, building (I am sorry to say) an idle castle in the air, in which I fancied myself in Charlie's place, winning honours and distinctions, and prizing

them only for the pleasure they were to give my father. I was roused from my amusement at last by feeling a very cold hand on my shoulder, and a voice, half playful, half cross, exclaimed in my ear, "You wretched child, you have let the fire go out!"

A tall figure stood behind me. The handsome head, with its dark rich waves of brown hair, the straight features, the changeful eyes, the beautiful mouth, now shaded by a brown moustache, were all so familiar, that a certain strangeness in all made me feel for an instant more abashed than if I had been in the presence of a stranger. "Charlie!"—I hesitated. Yes, to be sure! "No need for me to say 'Janet!' If I had not seen you for a hundred years I should know that no other mortal but yourself would sit in a draughty room on an east-windy day like this, and let the fire go out. No, don't touch it; I am the only fire-doctor in the family."

He walked to the fire, and began violently raking out the half-extinguished cinders. "Where are my mother and Nesta?" he asked.

"Upstairs in your room, making ready for you," I answered.

"What, at it still? I thought I should have

escaped all the fuss. I wish I had not missed that early train."

"You would have been here the sooner," I said.

"Not I. I should have been spending the day with some other men at Ely, but I missed them, so I came on home."

"For want of something better to do? Oh Charlie!"

"Well, you don't seem so especially glad to see me that I need make great haste to come to you."

Before I had time to answer, my mother and Nesta, having heard the news of his arrival, came running into the room together. There was no want of warmth in their welcome, and Charlie, having perhaps expended his uncomfortable feeling on me, responded to it graciously.

The air of grown-up mannishness and dash that had overawed me did not prevent Nesta from recognising the real Charlie. She fell at once into her old position towards him, which was that of a domineering slave.

She waited on him as never sultan was waited on, running away with his heavy coat, and bringing him slippers that had been warmed all day, and spoiling him to his heart's content; yet, all through the talk that followed, the asking after old friends, the

recurrence to old jokes and family mysteries, she did not let him escape a pretty sharp fire of banter upon certain little alterations in his dress, speech, and manner, including an incipient beard and moustache, which I should never have noticed separately, but which, combined, had given me the feeling of strangeness I had received when Charlie first entered. Many sisters experience this feeling in welcoming to a very quiet home a brother who has been long absent from them in the world.

For a time Charlie defended himself stoutly, finding wonderfully philosophical reasons to give for his way of parting his hair, for the style of his dress, and for his constant use of certain words and phrases, to which Nesta objected on the ground of our father's well-known hatred to every kind of slang. As the evening passed on, however, I observed that he looked at the little clock on the chimney-piece oftener than I did, and when the half-hour after nine struck, he disappeared from the room.

At ten, when, punctual as clock-work, my father's knock came, we heard him rush downstairs to open the door. Five minutes afterwards my father entered the drawing-room, and Charlie, following a little behind, stood still in the doorway, and made a grimace

of disgust towards Nesta, as calling upon her to look and mourn over her doings. The moustache had disappeared, and every other novel item in the costume : it was altogether our own Charlie again, with an expression on his face that we had often seen there in old times, when, after a school-boy scrape, he had been making peace—a little serious, a little shame-faced, but with a spark of comicality twinkling in his eyes, which seemed to warn us, "Don't make too much of this fit of submission, I don't at all intend it to have more than its turn." We were all too well trained to utter an exclamation ; but when my father, turning round, drew Charlie gently forward under the lamp, and took a long straining look into his face, Nesta and I exchanged glances of congratulation. A low sigh, which sounded to me like a sigh of relief, caught my quick ears, as my father withdrew his hand from Charlie's shoulder and raised it to shade his eyes—his old gesture, only used now when an unusual effort to see clearly had brought back the almost forgotten pain. It was not my father's fault that Charlie remained grave and silent for the rest of the evening ; he gave him encouragement enough to talk, and seemed anxious to hear every particular of the day's journey. His kindness

was not quite thrown away however. I was pleased to see that Charlie did not hurry off to bed when my mother, Nesta and I left the room, as he was wont to do when he dreaded a lecture; and when I returned to the drawing-room five minutes afterwards to look for a book, I found that he had betaken himself to his old favourite seat, on the arm of my father's chair; while my father, turning his face towards him, was saying, in that peculiarly gentle tone of his, which I used to think belonged to Charlie and my mother alone:

"Come, now, my boy, let us talk this business of the scholarship over, together; I want to understand it."

I slipped noiselessly away; leaving them to have their talk out undisturbed. It had at least two good results—one was, that Charlie having been brought to confess his past idleness, was obliged to shut himself up every day in the den for an hour or two's reading; the second, that he reserved all expression of his disgust at what he called the confined nature of college studies for Nesta's and my benefit, instead of inflicting them also on my father and mother. Nesta and I were by this time pretty well used to Charlie's habit of always thinking himself cleverer

than his teachers, but we were somewhat astonished to hear the tone of contemptuous pity in which he now spoke of dignitaries of whom my father stood in awe. Nesta laughed at him, but I used to grow angry. It was hardly probable, I argued, that among so many learned and experienced men, there should not be one capable of understanding the requirements of Charlie's genius. I would not be persuaded by all his eloquence and ridicule that he could not, if he chose, learn something worth knowing from some of them. I don't think, however, that I did much good by arguing with him, and it certainly promoted the family peace when a new subject of interest came up and diverted my thoughts and Nesta's into a fresh channel. We heard from Hilary that Lady Helen Carr had actually come to London, and that she might be expected soon to call on us, having promised Mr. Lester to lose no time in doing so. Rosamond, who was to be presented this spring, was to join Lady Helen in London shortly. She was very anxious to know us, Hilary said, and looked forward to spending many days in Nesta's and my company, and to having us frequently with her.

It cannot be denied that this news opened a somewhat dazzling prospect before Nesta and me. Perhaps

we talked too much about it; too much, certainly, for our father's and Mr. Armstrong's patience. They began to declare that they hated the sound of Lady Helen's name; and even Charlie rebelled when he found that Nesta persisted in spoiling the comfort of the drawing-room by banishing all untidy-looking books and work-baskets from it; and that she and my mother considered it necessary to establish themselves in state and idleness there every afternoon, instead of being ready to go out or sit with him in the den. We were all relieved when, at the end of three weeks' waiting, a thoroughly wet day gave us one afternoon when we thought we might feel secure from callers. My mother especially hailed it joyfully, as a respite from enforced idleness, for it was the last day but one before Charlie was to leave us, and she was anxious to secure Nesta's undivided attention for a final inspection of his wardrobe. My mother was fond of gathering all her work about her at once, and every one knows into what a state a tidy drawing-room may be brought by needlewomen who, on a rainy afternoon, have settled themselves to put a stitch in time into all the garments in their possession that require it. When the evening began to close in we had all earned the comfortable feeling

of having got through a great deal of business. Piles of neatly folded work occupied most of the chairs; the table was strewn with shreds of calico and thread-papers; and a row of newly marked collars hung round the fire to dry.

Charlie, who had chosen to stay out all the afternoon in the pouring rain, returned at six, very wet and shivering, and vehemently seconded a proposal of Nesta's that we should reward ourselves for our industry, by indulging in what we called a *nursery tea*. My mother was always glad of anything that put her in mind of nursery days, and the spirit with which Charlie entered into Nesta's plan gratified her. He insisted on having the old large nursery tea-kettle brought down to the drawing-room fire, and the old cups and plates, no two of which matched; and he claimed, with the vehemence of old times, the privilege of sitting on the hearthrug to make my mother's toast. The old objects brought old associations with them—old stories, old jokes, not worth laughing at, but charming to us, who from the advanced standing-ground we had gained, were beginning to look back with good-natured contempt on our childish selves—dearest of all, perhaps, to our mother, who, feeling rather faint-hearted as she looked

forward, was disposed to fancy those childish days of ours freer from care than she had found them while they were passing.

We were all very merry and somewhat noisy, or we could not have failed to hear a knock at our front door. Charlie and Nesta said afterwards they had heard it, but that it was such a consequential sound, they could not believe it came from our sober-minded knocker. However that may be, we were none of us prepared for the interruption when our little waiting-maid, half-hesitatingly, opened the drawing-room door, and announced, "Please, marm, Lady Helleng Cart's called. She would come in. Where am I to take her to? The fire in the dining-room's gone out, and she is in the hall now."

"No, not in the hall, dear Mrs. Scott; here," a clear shrill voice said, and gliding in some mysterious manner before the stolid figure of the servant who resolutely stood her ground, a graceful figure came forward into the fitful fire-light. "It was very presumptuous of me, but I *could* not wait to know if I were welcome; the sound of your voices and laughter *drew* me up the stairs—I could not resist it. No, do not any of you move, please; ask me to sit down among you. Think what a pleasure such a tea-

drinking as this will give a poor solitary like me, who eats and drinks alone, or starves in company."

We did not all sit still, we had risen in some confusion before this long address came to an end; but I felt the charm of my mother's innate good manners, when I saw how easily she fell in to her visitor's wish, putting aside the housewifely vexation I knew she must be feeling. There was a little trembling in her voice when she directed Charlie to remove a work-basket from a cushioned chair, and wheel it to the fire for Lady Helen; but she did not attempt any explanation of the irregularities of our nursery tea, or stop Nesta with a frown when she offered tea in a pink cup with a brown saucer. I really don't think, either, that Lady Helen saw anything amiss in the arrangements of the room. When she was seated—by which time Charlie, with a gentleman's injudiciousness, had turned on the gaslight—I noticed that she looked quickly from one to another, but it was at *us* she looked; at my mother's gentle fair face; at Charlie as he stood under the lamp; at Nesta, who, after having presented the tea, took the low seat Charlie had left on the hearthrug, almost at her feet; even I sustained a quick penetrating look which I felt was not altogether disapproving. A

shade came over our visitor's face when she had thus surveyed us all: her flow of talk ceased, and for an instant or two she sat silent, slowly stirring her tea; not with any air of embarrassment, but as if she had suddenly fallen into a reverie. She had come to us on her way to an evening party, and was dressed in a velvet dress of very dark blue, the darkness of which one or two diamond ornaments relieved. I thought the richness of her dress made her sallow face and thin figure look quaintly withered and insignificant, and that she might have sat for the likeness of a capricious fairy godmother in a German tale. The silence lasted some minutes, for we were none of us sufficiently composed to begin a conversation. Lady Helen broke it first.

"You could not forget that I am here, could you," she said; "and go on talking and laughing as you were doing before I came in? I should so like to hear it for once; I don't want to spoil the enjoyment of your evening."

Her tone of voice was almost supplicating, and went to Nesta's heart. In the quick impulsive way which, with all her reserve, she had sometimes, she took one of Lady Helen's hands.

"It would not help us to enjoy ourselves to forget

that you are here," she said ; " and it would be impossible."

Lady Helen, without disengaging her hand from Nesta's clasp, used it to raise her drooping face towards the light. " You pretty child ! " then turning to my mother, " Oh, Mrs. Scott, how I do envy you ! I used to despise daughters, and feel thankful not to have had one ; the sight of this one of yours tempts me to change my mind. But no, my daughter would not have been like this, she might have been like myself, and then we should have quarrelled terribly. I should not have liked to see a repetition of my own faults and oddities. I am better alone, don't you think so ? "

My mother answered, that she did not know ; " It was difficult to say whether people were better off with few or many children—that was all ordered ; but she agreed with Lady Helen ; it *was* a trial to see one's faults reappear in one's children, perhaps however it was only in seeing them there, that one could be quite sorry enough for them."

Lady Helen's face showed a slight surprise at hearing her random speech answered so seriously. " My dear, you know nothing at all about it," she said. " You never had a fault in your life, and as for defi-

ciencies," she paused and looked keenly down into Nesta's face, as if she were looking for something there. My mother took advantage of the silence to ask a question which all this time had been trembling on her tongue. How long was it since Lady Helen had seen Hilary, and how had he looked when she last saw him?—she, his mother, had not seen him for two whole years. One eager question followed another, for Lady Helen answered fully and readily. If there was, as I suspected, sometimes a little sarcasm in the tone in which she dwelt on very small details, my mother was not likely to find it out. It seemed quite natural to her that Lady Helen should have noticed how quickly Hilary had ridden to Tann y Bryn and back, to summon a doctor when Mr. Lester had been taken suddenly ill; how cleverly he had recovered Rosamond's pet dog when it had been stolen by gipsies; and how patiently he held tangled skeins of silk for Rosamond's companion, old Mrs. Western. She did not perceive, as I did, that all Lady Helen's anecdotes tended to show Hilary in the light of a mere hanger-on at Morfa Mawr. I grew so impatient of hearing him pictured in this character, that I interrupted Lady Helen's last story with an abrupt question about our cousin Rosamond.

"We are all so curious about her," I said. "Do describe her to us, and tell us what you think of her."

Lady Helen turned towards me; "I am so glad you, and not any one else, asked me that question," she said, "for I am quite sure you will understand my answer, though it will be another question. Is it fair to ask me to describe a person I don't know?"

"But you do know Rosamond Lester; you have known her since she was a child," my mother exclaimed.

"Your daughter shall judge whether I know her or not. Has not some wise man (Carlyle, I think) said, or written, that we can only *know* what we *love*? Now Rosamond and I hate each other, consequently we are perfect strangers. Is that well-reasoned, Miss Janet?"

"But not true," my mother gently interposed. "You know, Lady Helen, you always were fond of saying things about yourself you did not mean. Middle-aged women like you and me cannot hate a young girl."

"Can they not? Well, perhaps, you are right; hate *is* too strong a word—dislike will do. Middle-aged women, as you call us—and how dreadful it sounds!—have seldom motive enough for such an

active feeling as hatred, unless perhaps the young girls happen to be their daughters-in-law; in that case I hope you will allow that no expression can be too strong for the feeling."

"Oh!" I could not help exclaiming hastily; "then *that* is why you hate Rosamond Lester?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Janet, but *what* is why? It is stupid of me not to understand you, but I do not."

With those politely questioning eyes fixed on me, I felt how incautiously I had spoken. "I meant—I thought," I stammered in some confusion, "that perhaps you dislike Miss Lester because she is likely one day to be—what you said."

"My daughter-in-law! My dear Miss Janet, you are really very ingenious; and considering that you know nothing of the circumstances, your guess is not a very improbable one. Your brother would have enlightened you if you had imparted your idea to him; he would have told you, to how many thousands a year Miss Lester is heiress; and with your good sense you would have seen at once that such a person is not to be lightly disposed of. She will no doubt 'break some country hearts for pastime ere she comes to town;' but happily my son's is not a *country* heart."

"But, Lady Helen," my mother said, anxiously, "I hope Mr. Lester won't set his heart on any one person, or try unduly to influence his granddaughter's choice; I hope he will remember—" My mother here suddenly recollected to whom she was speaking, and stopped in dire confusion.

Lady Helen waited in an attitude of quiet attention, and then said, "I think you have not quite finished your sentence, dear Mrs. Scott."

"Well, remember how different old people's and young people's tastes in such matters always are," my mother bravely concluded.

"Used to be, you mean," Lady Helen answered. "Yes, you and I can remember a time when girls of eighteen and men of two-and-twenty, or even older, thought themselves young enough to fall in love, and upset their friends' plans, with all sorts of vagaries; but such things are traditions now. Now the young people make worldly-wise schemes for themselves, and the elders are reduced to the tame amusement of watching how cleverly they carry them out. You know how indolent I am; well, I have promised Mr. Lester to act as Rosamond's *chaperon* during her first season in London. You may judge how confident I am in her wisdom,

and how little trouble I expect to have on her account."

"She used to be so self-willed," I remarked.

"So she still is; but since her will is a prudent one, we elders have nothing to do but let her have it. She is proud enough to know her own value, and quite fond enough of distinction and homage to aim at making a great marriage without our suggesting the wish."

"But can Rosamond really be so proud and worldly-minded?" said my mother, wonderingly; "Hilary has given us quite a different character of her. He describes her as being quite simple-hearted and kind, and so useful, taking an interest in the farm business, and in the poor, and riding about to all the outlying cottages."

"Simple-hearted, useful, and kind; that is your son's view of her character, then?" Lady Helen said reflectively. "Well, I do not dispute his judgment; we have all more than one character; and it is generally quite impossible to say which is the true one. I should be sorry to restrict Rosamond to the one she shows to me. Your son, from the position he holds at Morfa, has opportunities of judging which I have not."

I was provoked by the emphasis Lady Helen laid on the word "position," to express a thought I might otherwise have kept to myself. "Lady Helen," I said, "you were quoting Carlyle just now; do you remember what he says about people being able to see in others *only* the evil or the good they have in themselves?"

Lady Helen turned slightly, so as to look me full in the face. "My dear girl, that is rather a clever remark, but, pardon me, it ought to have been made behind my back, not to my face; it is never worth while, even for the sake of saying a clever thing, to be rude to any one."

I was silenced for the evening; but happily my mother was able, with a clear conscience, to assure Lady Helen that I had not meant to say anything rude, I was too fond of talking, and often made foolish remarks, but she trusted that I was never intentionally rude to any one.

Lady Helen listened to my mother's explanation graciously, though not without directing an incredulous, amused smile towards me, which I felt was more friendly than I deserved.

Soon afterwards she rose to go, and, in taking leave, expressed a hope that she should, for the

future, see much of us. Rosamond was hoping to have the pleasure of her cousins' company constantly, and had made many plans for inducing us to share in the pleasures and amusements her London season was to introduce her to.

My mother shook her head doubtfully, and began a sentence about Mr. Scott's unfortunate dislike to society; but Lady Helen did not wait for her to finish it. "Eight o'clock!" she exclaimed; "is it possible? I ought now to be at the other end of London. Well, good-bye; I see I have gained the young people, and I leave the matter in their hands. However strict Mr. Scott's views about society may be, I am sure they will be modified by the pleading of such sweet brown eyes as these down here." She stroked Nesta's cheek as she said this, shook hands hurriedly with my mother and me, and left us.

It was not till Charlie had returned from handing her to her carriage that we were sufficiently at our ease to begin making remarks upon our visitor. My mother spoke first.

"Well, I certainly never was more surprised in my life," she said. "It was very inconsiderate of Lady Helen to call on such a rainy day; and yet I cannot be sorry that she came. It is pleasant to

know that it is only a fortnight to-day since she saw Hilary, and she has told me many things about him that I am very glad to know. I shall always think the better of her for knowing so much about Hilary."

"I like her, Janet," whispered Neta. "I cannot help liking her. I hope you won't mind it. Did you notice how sad she looked when she was not speaking?"

Charlie pronounced that she had *character*, a dictum which at that period was the single meed of praise he ever awarded to any one, for he professed to think it a matter of indifference whether the character were good or bad, so long as it was (what he called) individual.

Our father, who had been detained by a meeting of school trustees (a quarterly infliction especially hateful to him), came home very late and much tired—too tired to show any interest in our account of Lady Helen's visit, or to take other notice of her invitation to us than by pronouncing an indifferent "Indeed!" when my mother repeated it verbally,

CHAPTER X.

„Du, die du alle Wunden heilest,
Der Freundschaft zarte leise Hand,
Des Lebens Bürden liebend theilest—
Du, die ich früher suchst und fand.“

SCHILLER.

CHARLIE left us the next morning, and our days fell into the routine which his coming had disturbed. We had no second visit from Lady Helen, neither did we hear any news of Rosamond Lester, though we knew from Hilary's letters that she must now be in London. Seeing that our father disliked the subject, we left off talking about her coming; but Nesta and I wasted many half-hours privately in wondering when we should first see her; whether she really wished to make us her constant companions; and if she did, whether we should be allowed to be much with her. When we were alone, we laid elaborate

plots for learning our father's decision on this matter; but when we saw his worn anxious face at night, we had not the heart to ask him any questions. An accident at last led to the desired talk. One evening, about a fortnight after Charlie had left us, Mr. Armstrong called earlier than usual to walk with my father to the lecture; and while I was still occupied in arranging my father's notes and books, he sauntered to my writing-table, and amused himself by turning over the scraps of paper with which it was littered. He was welcome to turn them over, for, with the exception of some little pictures with which, in idle moments, I had adorned the edges of sheets, they contained only half-worked sums and problems in algebra. It was one of the duties bequeathed to me by Hilary to work out in full, and write legibly, all the sums and problems on which the boys in my father's class were likely to be engaged during the week; that my father might spare his eyes by making the monitor of the class correct their papers by mine, instead of looking them over himself. I had no great aptitude for figures, and must have resigned my task long ago, if Mr. Armstrong had not, since Hilary's departure, made a practice of dropping in before the lecture-hour, on one evening of every week,

and carrying off from my table all the half-done and wrongly-done sums he could lay his hands upon. These usually came back to me in one of my father's coat-pockets when he returned from the lecture, not only correctly worked, but with explanatory notes appended, which made all my puzzles clear to me.

On the Friday week after Charlie left us, I was conscious that I was very much behind-hand with my work. I had devoted a long afternoon to it in the hope of making up for past dreamy hours; but I had not been in the right mood; the figures would not add up, and I had impatiently thrown aside one problem after another in despair. When I saw how many papers Mr. Armstrong was preparing to carry away, I was so much ashamed of myself, that I could not help speaking crossly.

"Papa is ready, Mr. Armstrong," I said; "and I do wish that you would leave all those papers alone. I know some of them are wrong, but I can put them right. It is very disagreeable to have one's work taken away just as one is beginning to understand it."

"I know it is disagreeable," he answered, "and therefore I will not have my work taken away from me. I have lit upon a puzzle which I must solve.

I do not understand the meaning of this week's illustrations. Hitherto I have followed you with great success, and known, by the pictures on the margin of your sums, what books you have been reading. I have made out the end of several novels of which I have only had patience to read the beginning; but I cannot discover in what company you have spent this last week. I ought surely to know this satirical old lady and her haughty daughter down here in this corner. Ah! and here are your sister and yourself in the background. Surely this must be an incipient novel of your own?"

"It is no such thing," I said hastily; "I suppose there is nothing ridiculous in sketching people that one has really seen. The elder lady is a likeness of Lady Helen Carr, and the younger is meant for Rosamond Lester—that is all."

"So much the more I shall enjoy looking at them; I know we are going to have a dull lecture to-night, and as I dare not set the example of going to sleep, I must have something to amuse me."

I allowed Mr. Armstrong to put the papers in his pocket as he finished speaking, for I perceived that my father, who seldom paid much attention to our little quarrels, had heard and been struck by what we

were saying. He turned back, and put his hand on my head.

"What, you too, Janet?" he said, "are *your* thoughts running on Lady Helen and her promised gaieties? I did not think you had been so foolish, child."

I was seldom annoyed by anything my father said, but somehow it vexed me to be called a foolish child, and accused before Mr. Armstrong of letting my thoughts run on gaieties. I am afraid I drew my head away very ill-humouredly from under my father's hand, and that my face expressed considerable vexation; but before I had time to say anything, he had left the room. I knew that he would not forget my look and gesture, and that we should neither of us be happy till we had talked the matter out, so I lingered in the dining-room at night, after my mother and Nesta had gone up to bed. My father was sitting in a rather dejected attitude, with his elbows on his knees, and his head bowed between his hands. When I ventured to take Charlie's place on the arm of his chair, he did not speak for some time; then lifting up his head, he said aloud, but not to me:—

"'Who maketh men to be of one mind in a house;'
—Yes, only He can do it;—He, the Father of spirits.

Earthly fathers acknowledge His power when they try to obtain that great blessing, 'one mind in a house,' and fail."

"Oh papa!" I began, "I am very sorry—if we had known that you disliked the thought of our visiting our cousin Rosamond so very much, we would have given up the idea at once."

"You are a good child, Janet; but I was not thinking only of Rosamond Lester, or of that one point, on which I see that there are two minds among us. I was looking backwards and forwards. Janet, I do believe that it is a great misfortune to a family for one member of it to have belonged once to a higher rank than the rest. The distinction is never forgotten; it comes up again and again. The old associations, the old prejudices, are renewed at the most unexpected times, on the most opposite subjects; and when friends from the old circle interfere with foolish patronage, there is no saying where the mischief will end."

"Papa," I said, "if you really think that it is mischief, we will give up seeing Rosamond Lester."

"I am sure that it is mischief, but I am not sure that I can or ought to prevent your knowing her. I cannot forbid your cousin coming here to chatter about her gaities, and fill your head and Nesta's with vain

longing after pleasures unsuited to your station ; and if I refuse to let you have them, I cannot prevent your poor mother from thinking secretly that I have injured you, by keeping you out of the society to which she thinks you properly belong. And then, Janet, I am not clear that I should do right in putting that mortification on her who has already borne so many."

My father's voice dropped ; he was falling into a reverie again. I roused him by putting down my hand, and smoothing out the deep furrows into which he had knit his brows.

"But, papa," I said, "why should you fear that our knowing Rosamond, and spending a few evenings at Lady Helen's house, should do us so much harm? You must not think so badly of Nesta and me, as to suppose that we shall be easily made discontented with our own home."

"Ah, Janet! I thought you were above coaxing. Well, I must make the best of it. I comfort myself by believing that you will see less of these people than you imagine. When your cousin is once engaged in the round of dissipation to which Lady Helen will introduce her, she will have no time for seeking you out, in our remote part of the world."

“But, Lady Helen said we were to go to her.”

“Well, we shall see.”

“We *may* go then if we are asked, and you will not dislike our going?”

“You may go, and I will trust you. There is one point I must mention, Janet, and that is, you must be careful not to be led into unnecessary expense. Charlie seems a little bewildered as to the capacities of my purse, and as to what are his reasonable claims on it.”

“But indeed, papa,” I cried, “Nesta and I never thought of incurring expense.”

“You will have to think of it, if you begin to associate with such people as Rosamond Lester; but never mind; I trust you, Janet; you will never misunderstand me, or think I grudge you anything. Perhaps I am growing fanciful, but there was a tone in Charlie’s voice, when he and I talked over his college expenses that last evening, which lingers in my ear, and *will* go on grieving me; the ear grows sensitive, *over* sensitive, when one has to depend on it for almost all the impressions one receives. If I could have seen my boy’s face as distinctly as I used to see it, I should not have fancied that he was dissatisfied with what I was

doing for him; he must have known it was all I could do."

"Yes, indeed," I said, and I tried by the heartiness of my assurance, to make up for certain misgivings in my heart. I had seen Charlie's face, and I had not liked the expression on it any better than the tone of his voice.

When I had wished my father good-night, I saw him go to his desk, open a long unused drawer in it, and take out a bundle of papers. I remembered how, some years ago, he used, late in the evening, to sit down before that desk, with his books and papers around him, and how my mother used to complain about his writing far into the night, and waking her in the early morning, by talking in his sleep, about battles and conspiracies, and "the deaths of kings." Now I saw him take up one closely written sheet after another, hold it to the lamp, and then, with a melancholy shake of the head, return it to the drawer.

"If my eyes had served me a little longer," I heard him say, "I could have finished it, but it was *not* to be—it was *not* to be."

My father had a way of saying these words over and over to himself. To him, I am sure, they con-

veyed some sort of comfort ; to me the mournfulness of his resignation was more oppressing than any complaining could have been.

After this conversation, Nesta and I considered it a settled point that we were to accept Lady Helen's invitations, and as time passed on, we began to be a little impatient for an opportunity to arrive for availing ourselves of the permission we had gained. That we might be ready for any emergency, my mother purchased a sufficient number of yards of white muslin to make us each a new evening dress, and Nesta and I spent our afternoons in hemming flounces for them. How strange it is to me now to recall the talk we had over that work !

"Do you think," Nesta said, one afternoon when we had been silent some little time, "that we shall see Charlie's friend some day when we are at Lady Helen's? I have such a great curiosity to see him ; I always had."

"Charlie's friend—Mr. Carr, do you mean?" I asked. "I dare say we shall see him. But what then? There are many other people I had much rather see."

"Yes, because you read so much more, and know more about authors and people than I do. Now, I

have read Mr. Carr's book over and over again, and I certainly should like to see him. I don't wish to talk to him—I could not do that; but I should like to sit a little out of the way, and hear him talk to you. Oh, Janet, *do* you think such an evening as that will come?"

It was a prospect, on the whole, very agreeable to me, and Nesta and I often relieved the monotony of our hemming by recurring to it. We looked over the well-worn volume of poems which Mr. Carr had sent Charlie, and marked passages which Nesta thought I might ask to have explained. "You know," she pleaded, "even Mr. Armstrong does not understand these lines, but the person who wrote them must; and when he has made his meaning plain to us, how pleasant it will be! We shall care more for them than for all the rest of the book, which every one understands."

I was surprised to find how well Nesta knew the poems in this volume already, and how much more they meant to her than to me.

The flounces were all hemmed, and the dresses ready for use, some weeks before the least chance of their being wanted arose. It was not till the second week in May, that on returning from a walk, we

heard that a young lady had been sitting for a long time with my mother. We concluded at once that it was Rosamond Lester, and hastened joyfully to the drawing-room. We found our visitor sitting on the sofa close to our mother, with both her hands affectionately clasped in hers. For a moment we feared we must have been mistaken in our guess, but when at the sound of our footsteps she turned her face towards us, we recognised her at once. She had grown much since we had last seen her, for she was now much above the common height, but her face had only changed in having developed into greater beauty. The large dark eyes, which I remembered so well, and had so often pictured to myself, met mine with the old startled look in them. She reminded me still of some shy, half-tamed creature, whose confidence might be won, but who was ready to start away, or turn restive at an unaccustomed look or word.

My mother had tamed her at once—that I learned by the attitude in which I had seen them together when I entered; but she looked somewhat doubtfully at us, as if she were not quite sure how far we were to be trusted.

“Oh, Janet,” my mother began, addressing me,

when we had shaken hands with our cousin, and were seated, "you can't think what a happy morning I have had. Rosamond has been sitting with me ever since you went out, and we have been talking all the time about Hilary. She has told me so many pleasant things, which you shall hear by and by. I only regret that we did not see her sooner. She has been three weeks in London, and every day something has prevented her coming to us."

Miss Lester, who had been speaking aside to Nesta, broke off abruptly, and turned again to my mother.

"I did not say something prevented me, but some person. I would not have allowed any *thing* to keep me from you, and for the future I mean to be independent in my coming and going. For a time London air made me feel too indolent to do battle for my rights, but last night Lady Helen Carr and I came to an understanding. I think I have made good use of my regained freedom, for in walking here this morning I have done what I should certainly never have obtained permission to do."

"Then I am sorry you came," my mother observed, gravely. "I am sorry that, even to please me, you

should do anything for which Lady Helen might blame you."

"She will not blame me, not openly at least. She knows better than to do that. No one ever does blame me but my grandfather; that is a privilege which he reserves exclusively to himself."

"But why does Lady Helen object to your coming to see us?" I asked.

"She does not object to my coming to see you; it was she herself who lured me up to London, by promising that I should see you often. She merely objects to my walking through the streets, or to my having the carriage in the morning till she is ready to attend me, or to my driving anywhere but in the parks in the afternoon, and generally to my spending an hour of my time in any way which she has not planned."

"How I pity you!" I exclaimed, heartily.

"Janet, for shame!" said my mother. "Lady Helen is quite right. Miss Lester has been entrusted to her charge, and it is her duty to take care of her. It is yours, my dear, to obey her. I am afraid you are not fond of doing as you are bid."

"I think I should be fond of doing as you bade me; I think I should be very tractable if I lived

always with you. It will do me good to come here. I shall come to you for fresh air, just as at home I climb up the mountain, when Morfa Valley—the ‘Happy Valley,’ as people call it, to flatter my grandfather—feels too narrow to breathe in.”

My mother looked puzzled. “My dear, I am afraid you will not get much fresh air here—nothing like mountain air. We consider our neighbourhood tolerably healthy for London, but I used to find the air very oppressive when I first lived here. However, if you do feel better here than in Lady Helen’s house we shall be glad, for we cannot see you too often.”

“Thank you. I hope you may be able to say so when you know me better. I warn you that I can be very disagreeable at times, disagreeable and discontented, as my cousin Hilary has no doubt told you. By the way, he is fond enough of scolding me.”

“If you really are discontented, you deserve to be scolded. But, my dear, I don’t understand how you can be. You seem to me to have everything that a young person can wish for; you ought to be grateful. I am sure you are.”

“No, I am not. However, I will acknowledge

that I have every *thing* a person can want. I often think I should like to have fewer things—I grow so tired of them all, and I don't feel that they are really mine. I am one of my grandfather's belongings, and like everything else that is his, I must be dressed out, and trained to look well in my place. I am never supposed to have a will of my own, and by and by, he means to make me and my possessions over to some one else."

"My dear Rosamond, I don't like to hear you speak so disrespectfully of your grandfather."

"We will not speak of him then. Let us talk of something else. I was trying to make you understand where the old hazel-fenced walk joins the new garden. May I take this pencil and sketch the new entrance for you?"

Admiring the sketch, and comparing it with stray sentences of description in Hilary's letters, brought us back to easy confidential chat about every-day doings at Morfa. If Miss Lester did not enjoy relating the details which our questions drew from her as much as we enjoyed hearing them, she at least put on the appearance of doing so; and our mother had such full confidence in her amiability that she sent me upstairs to bring down a fresh

batch of Hilary's letters to be looked over when we had exhausted those she kept in her desk.

I was absent some minutes. When I re-entered I heard a fresh voice speaking rather loud, and saw to my secret dismay Lady Helen Carr seated on the sofa by my mother.

Lady Helen was addressing Rosamond, and did not immediately interrupt herself to speak to me. "My dear child," I heard her say, "if you had but taken the trouble to tell me that you were coming here, I would not have interrupted you. I would have sent the carriage for you later; as it is, I have wasted the morning in hunting you from place to place; and now I must drag you away against your will and my own, for if we are to go to Lady Melville's concert, we must hasten home. Ah, Miss Janet, you are come to make my task harder than ever. How shall I persuade Rosamond to come away, now you have brought some more letters to read? You have hunted out all these; how kind!"

"We were not going to read them *all*," I said, blushing, and feeling under Lady Helen's satirical eye as if we had been caught doing something of which we ought to be ashamed.

"And why not? I have no doubt they are worth reading. Letters written in full family confidence are always interesting, especially when they come from one's own neighbourhood, and one has a chance of finding some mention of one's self in them. I am sure Rosamond misses a great deal by not hearing these."

Lady Helen's tone was quite polite, but I felt there was some sarcasm hidden in her words, for Rosamond's cheek flushed on hearing them, and her dark brows lowered over her eyes. Yes, they might almost be called fierce eyes now, as she stood confronting Lady Helen.

Without noticing her angry look, Lady Helen turned to the table, on which several closely written sheets lay open.

"What a pleasure it must be to you," she said to my mother, "to receive such letters, and how remarkable it is that such a busy person as your son should find time to write them. I think I could match them for length with some which I received a week or two ago from Shafto; but then his merit would not be the same, for he has nothing to do but write one thing or another, whenever the fancy takes him. A fancy for letter-writing took him when he

was staying at Morfa, and I profited by it; but I shall not read *his* letters to you, my dear Rosamond; *my* conscience would not permit me to administer such a potion to your vanity."

"Lady Helen," interrupted Rosamond, "you said you were in a hurry to go; I am ready."

"But stay, am I? not quite—I have something to say to Mrs. Scott. We were talking of engagements just now, and it puts me in mind that you have not said when your daughters are to come to me. It must be some evening when I am at home, and that, I am sorry to say, is very seldom."

My mother murmured something about hoping Lady Helen would not inconvenience herself on our account; in answer to which Lady Helen smiled, and "*only wished* her time was her own, and that she *could* spend it with the people she really preferred." Then she proceeded to turn over the leaves of her memorandum book, reading aloud to us, and commenting as she went on. "Tuesday, that is tomorrow; you will not accept so short an invitation. Wednesday, the opera. Thursday, Lady Linton's ball; a great bore, and terrible fatigue to me. I tried to get off, but Rosamond could not be excused. Friday and Saturday, and the early days of the

following week, are all occupied, I find, with engagements very little to my taste or yours ; but the week after I will be 'at home' myself. Tuesday is to be my night ; to-morrow fortnight then, my dear Mrs. Scott, you shall trust Janet and Ernestine to me. Thank you. I am glad we have settled it, for I may not be able to come so far northwards again ; and now, Rosamond, we positively must say good-bye."

"*I shall see you often again, I hope,*" Rosamond said in a low voice, as she shook hands with my mother.

Meanwhile, Lady Helen stroked Nesta's cheek, and complimented her on her pretty morning looks, and then, with more smiling good-byes, she sailed out of the room.

When the door had closed behind them, my mother looked up at Nesta and me, with some bewilderment in her eyes. "To-morrow fortnight," she said. "Dear me! how very busy fashionable people appear to be. Not one disengaged evening for a fortnight! We need not have been in such a hurry about the muslin dresses, and your father need not have been so disturbed by the thought of your visiting your cousin. Her coming to London will

not make any great difference to you, after all, I begin to think."

"We do not know yet; we shall see," I answered, shortly, being unwilling to confess even to myself how very blank I felt, and how much ashamed I was beginning to be of the foolish castles in the air we had been building. Before evening, however, Nesta and I had talked ourselves into good spirits again, and were so much the less prepared for a more complete disappointment which was in store for us. Four days before the much talked-of Tuesday the late post brought my mother a hasty note from Lady Helen, in which she informed us that Rosamond Lester had been unwell for some days, and that, though sorry to give up many pleasant engagements, and especially the prospect of seeing us, they had determined to return to Morfa for a fortnight for change of air.

My mother read the note aloud, and then threw it carelessly on the table. It did not surprise her as much as Nesta and I felt that it ought to have done.

"Poor Rosamond!" she said, "Lady Helen does quite right to take her back to Morfa if she is at all unwell; there is nothing like Morfa air. I wish, however they had told me sooner they were going;

I should have asked Rosamond to take charge of a parcel for Hilary. Those shirts Nesta has just finished would not make a very large parcel. Let me see; they don't go till to-morrow. Would there be any harm—"

"Yes, a great deal of harm. You must not think of such a thing," interrupted my father. "You seem to forget, my dear, that Hilary is Mr. Lester's land-agent, and that Miss Lester is not exactly the person who can be expected to convey his shirts to him."

"I am sure she would be very glad to do anything for him," answered my mother, quickly. "And, indeed, my dear, it is you who forget; you speak as if Hilary had no more right to be considered at Morfa than any one else. I believe that Rosamond sees things in a much more proper light, and feels how dreadful it is to be keeping Hilary out of his right place."

"Well, we will hope so," said my father; "but I advise you to take the proper feeling for granted, and not test it in the way you propose. Lady Helen's hospitality made a show till it was tried. Well, well! she is gone. Let her go in peace, and not come back again to trouble us. You will be much better and happier at home on Tuesday evening,

children—a great deal better, if you will only believe it.”

It was trying to have so little sympathy, but I could have borne it if we had been quite alone—if Mr. Armstrong had not been sitting with us when the note arrived. The most provoking part of the disappointment to me was that he should be present to witness our discomfiture. Ever since his discovery of my little pictures, he had shown (as I considered) an undue interest in what he chose to call our approaching introduction into the world. He had seen us once or twice engaged in hemming the muslin flounces, and he affected to consider me so pre-occupied with the prospect of gaiety, that it was necessary for him to put me in mind of every particular of my usual duties for my father.

I could believe that my father might have good reasons for rejoicing over the postponement of our long expected pleasure, but I considered that only innate hardness of heart could account for Mr. Armstrong's showing a like, or even greater satisfaction. How could our going or not going possibly affect him? I took an opportunity of expressing this conviction rather strongly before the evening was over, and thus found a vent for some of my ill-humour.

"Why," I asked, "should it please him to see me disappointed and unhappy? Was it not very ungenerous to show me such marked unfriendliness, when for my father's sake we were obliged to work together? I acknowledged freely, that I knew I was a much less agreeable partner in work than Hilary had been, but since our companionship could not be helped, might he not, with advantage, take more pains to conceal his dislike to it?"

I made these accusations hastily, and was hardly prepared for Mr. Armstrong's defending himself from them with greater earnestness than was at all usual with him. I suppose the little burst of pettishness relieved my mind, for I remember I was happier after my quarrel with Mr. Armstrong than I had been before. It gave me something fresh to think about. During the course of our dispute that evening, it dawned on me for the first time, that in spite of all his independence and professed abhorrence of sentiment, Mr. Armstrong did care a little about other people's liking—nay, that even my liking and friendliness was of some little consequence to him. It must have been the strangeness and unexpectedness of the discovery that made me turn it over so often in my mind.

CHAPTER XI.

“ Place your hands in mine, dear,
With their rose-leaf touch ;
If you heed my warning,
It will save you much.

“ Ah ! with just such smiling
Unbelieving eyes,
Years ago I heard it ;
You shall be more wise.”

A. A. PROCTER.

WE heard of Rosamond Lester's and Lady Helen's arrival at Morfa from Hilary, and then a long time passed without our receiving further news of them. May passed into June—a hot glaring June. My father found the bright sunshine very trying to his eyes during his long walks through the streets, and his mornings in the close school-house. For his sake I began then, first, to wish away the sunny June days, and to feel glad that another had gone, each

evening, when I wheeled his arm-chair to its summer-place by the open window, and prepared for the hour's reading aloud, which my father called the crowning hour of his day. Even Hilary seemed to have been made lazy by the hot weather. He not only neglected to answer my mother's repeated questions respecting Rosamond's health, but wrote shorter and less satisfactory letters than usual. At last a whole week passed without his writing at all, and my mother began to be uneasy. Nesta and I tasked our ingenuity every morning to find reasons for his silence, generally without much success. A tolerably sufficient reason happily suggested itself to me on the sixth morning of disappointment. I reminded my mother that it was haymaking time in the country, and she tried to comfort herself with the belief that we could not reasonably expect Hilary to find time to write, while such pressing country business was going on around him.

She entertained us with stories of haymaking times in her childhood for nearly half-an-hour after our father had left us ; then she went upstairs, and Nesta got out her work, and I took down a book (Wraxall's "History of France" it was) for our usual morning's historical reading. I was not much in the mood for

reading history that morning. The pictures which my mother had been painting for us of the sunny upland meadows, where the merry haymakers were now tossing the sweet grass, and listening to delicious sounds of dashing mountain torrents, were pleasanter to contemplate than the misdoings of kings and ministers. I turned over the leaves idly, trying, meanwhile, to talk myself into a better frame of mind.

"Look, Nesta," I said, "how much we have read during the last three weeks. These hot days favour reading by keeping people at home. It is comfortable to know one has the whole day before one, secure from visitors."

I had hardly said the word, when a knock was heard at the door—a quick tremulous knock—that somehow startled us both.

"There, that comes of injudicious boasting," cried Nesta. "Well, to confess the truth, I am not sorry to be interrupted."

"Only if we don't finish the volume before Charlie comes home, there is no saying when we shall finish it," I remarked, shutting up the book with our mark in the page. No saying, indeed! I have that book still with the mark where I shut it

in that morning. I could never persuade Nesta to listen to another word of it. Her girlish book education ended then.

"Who can our visitors be?" asked Nesta; "they are long in coming upstairs." So long that at last, fancying that I heard voices talking in the hall, I went out of the room to look over the banisters. The dining-room door was just closing, and our waiting-maid came up to me and announced that a gentleman wished to speak with Miss Janet in the parlour. A fear that some accident had happened to my father on his way to the school—a constant fear of mine, presented itself at once to my mind. I ran down the stairs I hardly knew how, and dashed into the room. I did not meet the face I had expected to see, and a feeling of relief came before astonishment. "Hilary!" I cried. "Is it you, Hilary? Oh! I am so glad. But how is it that you have come so suddenly; without warning us? Is anything the matter? What is the matter?"

The last question came tremblingly, when he had turned his full face to me, and I had taken in its stern sad expression, which never changed or lightened at sight of me. I had my arms round his neck before he found voice to speak.

"Oh, Hilary, tell me what has happened. Papa—"

He disengaged himself rather hastily. "No, no; it is nothing that concerns any of us; don't agitate yourself. I have come up to London on business."

The words fell coldly upon me—as words of Hilary's had never done before. We both remained silent for an instant, standing a little apart on the hearthrug; then Hilary spoke again, not looking at me, but fixing his eyes on the window-curtains opposite.

"Janet, Rosamond Lester is dangerously ill in typhus fever. The doctors have given her up—they say she is dying!"

I suppose I uttered a cry of dismay, for his next words were—

"Hush! don't make a noise about it, there is no occasion for that. I want you to tell me how soon you think my mother can be ready to start with me for Morfa. I have come to persuade her to return with me. Rosamond—Miss Lester, was delirious when I left the house; but ever since the fever began, ten days ago, she has done nothing but ask for our mother. She cannot bear the sound of Lady Helen's voice; and, indeed, Lady Helen is too frightened of the fever to be of the slightest use; she has

returned to London with me to-day. Mrs. Western is not much better. If Rosamond can be saved it depends on my mother to save her. How soon do you suppose she can be ready?"

It was so unlike Hilary to make a plan concerning our mother without thinking first of her comfort and pleasure, that, even with his suffering face before me, I could not help expressing my surprise.

"But, Hilary," I said, "how can you propose to carry mamma off to Morfa in this sudden way? How do you know that she will go with you at all?"

"She will come with me. Janet, tell her I am here; bring her down to me; we are wasting precious time on which life or death hangs!"

I walked trembling to the door; before I reached it Hilary came to me, and stooping down (he had grown such a tall powerful-looking man), left a cold grave kiss on my forehead.

"Don't frighten mamma," he said, in his own kind natural voice, "and yet be quick, Janet."

I was glad of that injunction, for it gave me an excuse for hurrying my mother downstairs before she had time to ask questions.

She did not see the trouble in Hilary's face as I

had done ; she only saw before her, alive and well—grown strong and handsome, too—her darling, her wonderful eldest son ; her eyes were too full of happy tears to note, at the first moment, more than that. Hilary's face changed as she hurried up to him ; the fixed stern look left it, and, instead, came that nervous quivering of lips and eyes, which in him, I knew, was a sign of strong feeling, strongly kept down. I left him to make his request to my mother as he best could, and went to enlighten Nesta as to what was going on.

She and I had only half exhausted our exclamations of sorrow at Hilary's tidings, when my mother joined us. There was a pink flush on each cheek, and a bright light in her eyes, but she did not look agitated or nervous. She was far more composed, indeed, than she would have been if I had brought her news of a downfall of soot from the drawing-room chimney, or a serious breakage in the kitchen.

"My dear children," she said, stepping up quickly to the writing-table, "I am going to write a little note to your father ; Hilary will take it to the school, and bring your father home with him."

As soon as the note was written, she sent me down with it to Hilary, who was waiting impatiently

at the hall-door. When I returned to the drawing-room I found her with a bunch of keys in her hand, giving directions to Nesta about the management of the house during her absence.

"You must help me, my dear children, to think of everything," she said, "for Hilary says he cannot give me more than three hours to prepare. Janet, dear, I have been telling Nesta that Rosamond Lester is dangerously ill in typhus fever, and Hilary thinks I ought to go and help to nurse her. She has done nothing but call for me ever since she was taken ill; and you know I am, after all, her nearest relation—the poor motherless child!"

"And you really mean to go?" I asked.

"Hilary seems to wish it very much—to have set his heart upon taking me with him. I could not bear to send him back alone, disappointed, to that neighbourhood where the fever is. I should never have another happy moment—and Janet, dear, I have only three hours to prepare; you must help me to think of everything that can be wanted, and not puzzle me with questions."

Thus, putting all doubt aside, my mother steadily turned her thoughts to the business of the moment—she, who ordinarily could not make the smallest

decision without difficulty, astonished us now by the strength and calmness she showed. Her head was clear for every detail of the packing, and she gave strangely minute directions to Nesta and me for the conduct of the house while she was away. Her box was packed and corded; Nesta was writing a direction for it, and my mother herself was smoothing out the strings of her bonnet, when my father and Hilary returned together. As they entered my mother's room I thought my father and mother had certainly changed characters that day, for his face expressed all the agitation and bewilderment I had expected to see on hers.

"My dear," he said, addressing my mother, "what is all this that Hilary tells me? I do not understand him; he seems to think that you are going to return with him to Morfa immediately. It seems to me a most preposterous idea — a most inconsiderate scheme!"

"Has he not explained to you," my mother answered, quietly continuing her work, "that Rosamond Lester is dangerously ill, and that he thinks I ought to go and nurse her?"

"*You!*" my father cried, and his voice rose, trembling a little with anger, as we had never heard

it since the days when Hilary's stupidity or Charlie's carelessness used to irritate him in lesson hours. "You!—and why are you to be called on to leave your home and family to nurse Mr. Lester's grandchild? What claim has Rosamond Lester upon you, that for her sake you should risk a life that belongs to me and to your children?"

There was a pause, my mother sighed gently, and my father turned to Hilary.

"But I blame you most," he said. "Mr. Lester might make such a request; you ought to have felt too much care for your mother to bring it. Do you value her life so little that you can endure the thought of her risking it for a person who can be nothing to you in comparison?"

I expected to see Hilary overwhelmed with trouble at this severe rebuke—he used to be so very sensitive to blame from my father. It was not so; the expression of his face did not change, the hard stony look seemed to have settled upon it; and he answered in the same set voice he had spoken in all the morning—

"‘Nothing to me!’ I never said she was. But there can be little risk of infection in a house like Morfa. I do not believe my mother would suffer."

"*Little risk, you believe!*" cried my father, impatiently.

There was silence again for a minute, and then Hilary, who had been leaning against the chimney-piece, with half-averted face, stood upright, and looking at my mother, said solemnly—

"It is a matter of life or death. Mother, decide at once; there is no time to lose. If you cannot return with me I shall go alone, but I think your coming to her is her only chance."

His very lips grew white as he spoke; no other part of his face had a shade of colour to lose. I believe my mother thought he meant that it was a question of his own life or death—and, indeed, there was that in his face that might have excused the thought—a look of quite wild terror came into her eyes. She caught one of Hilary's hands, and held it fast.

"No, not alone; you must not go alone. Charles, Charles, look at Hilary! I cannot let him go away alone!"

Only that once did I ever hear my mother call my father by his Christian name. It brought him to her side, and in a moment she was weeping on his shoulder, and he was soothing her, calling her gentle.

names—Ernestine was one. How strange it sounded to hear him called Charles and her Ernestine! Names which seemed long since to have passed over to us young ones. I do not know how long it was before we all grew more composed, but when my mother raised her head, and wiped away her tears, no one seemed inclined to make a question about her going. It was taken for granted that she was to go, and we all turned our thoughts to making such arrangements as would spare her fatigue or add to her comfort on the journey.

The time fixed for their departure came too soon. We all felt, however, that it was well to have a short leave-taking, and I tried to believe, that in hastening my mother away, Hilary was only showing his knowledge of what was best for her. I think, indeed, that she would have broken down quite at the last, if he had not been standing by her with his pale grave face, and if he had not interrupted her second request that we would write that very evening, by saying, "Mother, we shall be too late. You must get into the carriage now, or there is no use in your going at all."

My father went and shut himself up in his study after they had gone, and Nesta sat on the stairs, and had a good cry.

When it began to grow dusk, I stormed the door of the den, armed with a cup of strong coffee, and had the satisfaction of being allowed to sit on a volume of *Basnage* at my father's feet, while he took his coffee, but all my subsequent attempts to interest him in any of our usual occupations for leisure evenings, met with a gentle "Not to-night, my dear."

I contented myself at last with keeping my place by his side in silence, for more than an hour, receiving now and then a gentle pressure of his hand on my head, to assure me that my presence was not forgotten. If it had not been for that, I think I should not have felt justified in staying near my father in the dark, for he had a way of talking aloud to himself whenever he had been unusually agitated, repeating a verse from the Bible, or a sentence from a favourite author, which often enabled me to trace the course of his thoughts.

That evening, I remember, he said over two or three times a verse of *Keble's*, which I had read to him some Sundays before :—

" Oh vain and selfish sigh !
Out of the bosom of His love He spared,
The Father spared the Son for thee to die."

" For me—for an enemy," my father murmured ;

"and I spared so grudgingly. The old enmity rose up in my mind, the old jealousy—not dead yet, after all these years. Oh! what depths of sin unsubdued. 'The body of this death,'—selfishness—that is death; the spirit of sacrifice, true life. Janet, my child, how does that verse go on? there was something else in it I liked, when you read it to me."

I repeated :—

"Are there who sigh that no fond heart is theirs—
None loves them *best*? Ah vain and selfish sigh!
Out of the bosom of His love He spares,
The Father spares the Son for thee to die;
For thee He died, for thee He rose again;
O'er thee He watches through His boundless reign."

"Oh vain and selfish sigh!" my father emphasized when I had done. "Selfish, and how vain."

"Papa," I said, encouraged to speak a thought I had previously had in my mind, "Do you know, I was surprised when I found that Keble had written that. I should have thought only a woman would have had such a thought—that only women sigh *that* vain and selfish sigh."

My father smiled, and then hastily put his hand on my head, and drew me closer to him.

"My child—Janet," he said, "how came you to

have thought about it at all? You have your mother and me; you are in a safe warm nest of love; child, I cannot have you looking beyond that yet. I dread that morbid dissection of the feelings. I have suffered enough for all of you. Is not my love great enough to keep your heart warm?"

"Oh yes! yes! yes!" I said. "Papa, I shall never want any one but you; but I did not know before—how could I? you are so much greater than I—I did not know that you *cared* for all my love."

There was a short silence, and then my father said, "Janet, I have spoken wrongly; I have made you say something that cannot be true. My love is not enough to satisfy your heart; no human love can be. There is only one perfect enduring love in which the heart can live and rest. That is God's love. Some people learn this when they are young. They are the happy people; to them all other love comes with a blessing, safe and sweet—may you be one of these! Others *will* try everything else first. They make earthly homes for their hearts, and they are starved out from one after the other—starved out or driven out, naked, wounded, and cold—happy, if at last they find a safe home in the great Heart of God. Hide your heart in His, Janet, now, while it is unwounded,

unseared. *I cannot keep it safe for you, my child, but I would make the experience I have bought help you, if I could.*"

I had seldom seen my father so much moved, or heard him speak so strongly. I am afraid I was more occupied in wondering why he spoke as he did, then in resolving to profit by his counsel. Safety and peace were by no means the possession I coveted then.

After a little more talk, my father dismissed me to the drawing-room, saying that he feared Nesta would weary of being so long alone. The drawing-room was nearly dark when I entered it, and the sound of a low moan coming from a recumbent figure on the sofa, startled me. I was surprised that Nesta should continue to grieve so bitterly, and reproached myself with having left her so long.

"This will never do," I said, coming up to her, and putting my hand on her shoulder; "what would mamma say if she saw you?"

The person whom I had addressed slowly raised her head from the pillow where it had been closely buried, and answered in a faint voice, "It is not Nesta—it is I—Lady Helen Carr. I have been sitting with your sister; she has just left me to look for you. I came to hear whether your mother

had gone to Morfa or not ; I could not rest till I had heard."

"She left us at three o'clock," I answered, rather coolly. I could not help feeling angry with Lady Helen ; if she had not been so helpless, our mother would not have been wanted.

"She is very, very good," Lady Helen said, fervently.

If she had not announced herself, I should hardly have believed that the faint humble voice could be hers. A minute afterwards the passing of a lamp-lit carriage through the street cast a moving light into our room, which seemed to pass from the sofa to the wall, and then vanish.

Lady Helen started, and caught my hand. "What was that?" she asked, nervously.

"Only a light passing in the street," I said.

"Only a light?—how foolish and nervous all this has made me!—only a light!"

She burst into a strangely sounding fit of laughter as she finished speaking—laughter which shook her whole frame, and which broke out again and again, more uncontrollably as she tried to check it. I had never seen any one in hysterics before, and as I had not the least idea how to act in such an emergency, it

was a great relief to me when Nesta returned to the room.

She seemed to know by a sort of intuition what to do. Her simple remedies were efficacious after a time. Lady Helen gradually grew calmer; the painful laughter subsided into sobbing tears, and she lay back on the sofa, quiet, but exhausted, and almost fainting.

It was then very late, past eleven o'clock, and Lady Helen still seemed so unequal to any exertion, and so reluctant to return to her solitary house, that Nesta entreated her to remain and spend the night with us, suggesting that she might, if she pleased, rest on the bed in our room, while we sat by her to keep her company.

To my surprise, Lady Helen caught at the idea. It was too good of us to have her, she said; too good. She had rather stay in any corner—anywhere, than go back alone to that house where Rosamond had been so lately.

The mention of Rosamond's name brought a fresh flood of tears, and to prevent our father becoming alarmed or impatient, Nesta was obliged to hurry Lady Helen upstairs, and employ all her arts of soothing to induce her to compose and settle herself

for the night, while I dismissed our wearied servants to bed, and brought the long strange day to a close.

I had left Lady Helen to Nesta's care during the greater part of the evening, for I could not but allow that she was more equal to the charge than I; but when she seemed disposed to sleep, and the house grew still, I persuaded Nesta to go and lie down in Charlie's vacant room, and insisted on taking the night-watching as my share of the labour.

There was something exciting to me, and rather pleasurable than otherwise, in the thought of sitting up all night. I established myself in the old nursery arm-chair at the foot of our bed, and warded off attacks of sleepiness by watching the curious shadows cast by the night-light on the wall, and recalling every event of the past day, that had transported my mother to Morfa, and made Lady Helen an inmate of our house. My duties as sick-nurse proved very easy, and I suspect that I must have succumbed to drowsiness at last, for I remember starting up from my chair with a sort of shudder, just as the grey summer dawn began to creep into the room, and feeling very much surprised to find myself out of bed, and with all my clothes on.

As I watched the light increase, and heard the

noises of day begin, everything seemed so familiar and usual, that I began to fancy I must have had a long dream, and could not refrain from softly withdrawing the curtain at the foot of the bed, to assure myself by the sight of Lady Helen's face on Nesta's pillow, that my recollections of yesterday were real.

It was not a very judicious movement; I only held the curtain up for one minute, but in that minute a level ray of sunshine fell upon my patient's face, and woke her.

She started up with a bewildered look in her eyes, that made me fear a repetition of last night's scenes, but when she spoke I perceived she was quite herself, by the pettish tone in which she addressed me.

"Why did you wake me? I might have slept an hour longer, a whole hour longer; how could you wake me?"

I begged her pardon contritely, and besought her to try to sleep again.

"Sleep again! I suppose you can sleep when you like; it is a long time since I could. No, don't draw the curtains close, and move about on tiptoe. The mischief is done now. You had better make the room cheerful by letting in all the light you can, and come here and talk to me."

"Is it wise of you to excite yourself by talking?" I asked.

"Talking will excite me less than thinking. I will not say what the result will be if I lie still, looking at that white curtain, and thinking till it is time to get up. There, get into the bed and rest yourself, and let me have a face near me to look at, that will keep me from seeing *always* as I did yesterday, the death-stricken face of that poor child at Morfa."

"You did love her after all, then?" I said, as I arranged the pillows to support my patient comfortably, and humoured her by resting on the bed by her side.

"Love her! I don't know, I have been bitterly sorry before now, to lose people whom I always said that I hated while I had them."

"But you did not hate them; mamma says that you care much more for your friends than you profess to do; that you make yourself out less amiable than you really are. I wonder why you do that, it prevents people liking you."

"Not at all; most people are disposed to believe the contrary to what they are told; you must *praise* yourself if you wish to be disliked thoroughly.

Poor Rosamond Lester, however, took me at my word. Her dislike to me is a mania—an inherited one, perhaps. I can talk of it quietly enough to-day, but yesterday, I thought I should never cease hearing the agonized tones of her voice, when, in her raving, she intreated her nurses to keep *me* from her. I don't think I have ever done anything to deserve such dislike as that. I wonder if Shafto would drive me away from his bed if he were dying? whether, if all my friends were delirious and spoke the truth, they would say the same?"

"No, no," I cried, "it could be only the unreasonableness of illness, which made poor Rosamond dislike to have you near her. Her wish to be nursed by mamma is just as unreasonable; she has only seen her twice, and cannot have real affection for her."

"Perhaps not, but I have always thought that her love to your mother is part of her dislike to me. She has heard some foolish gossip which makes her fancy that I have taken your mother's place in her grandfather's favour, and interfered with her claims upon him."

"I did not know that she had any," I said.

"But your mother is Mr. Lester's nearest relation

after Rosamond; if Rosamond dies, she will be his heir, and he is one of the richest men in England; have you none of you ever thought of that?"

"No, and we will not think of it now, for Rosamond, I hope, is not going to die. She will recover, now that my mother has gone to nurse her. Should you dislike to tell me how her illness began, and whether you and she had been quite good friends before she was taken ill?"

"Ah! I see you are curious. No—I should not dislike telling you. I should like you to know the whole, and to show you how my feelings towards the poor child have been for some time past gradually growing more kindly. It was never my fault that we were not happy together: I have always tried to overcome her prejudice against me. For her grandfather's sake, and perhaps also a little for my own, I should have been glad if we could have been good friends. Her grandfather always hoped that I should take the place of a mother to her; indeed, he used at times to indulge in plans for her future which would have made the relationship between us real. I never shared them; even if I had thought it possible that Rosamond might be won by Shafto, I should have had no hope of his doing so worldly-wise a

thing as trying to win her. I expected that the very fact of her being an heiress would set him against her. I never had a greater surprise than when I read his first letter from Morfa, and found it full of praises of Rosamond, of her originality, her spirit, her nobility of character—I don't know what fine things Shafto did not find in her. At first I believed that he praised her out of perversity, because I had predicted that they could not live peaceably together for a week. It was not till they came to London, and had been some time in the same house with me, that I allowed myself to believe in their mutual liking. I do not deny that I was happy then, happier than I had ever expected to be again; to see my son married to the heiress of Morfa would indeed be a triumph to me. I said nothing, however; I tried not to interfere in any way. Mr. Lester wrote to me that he considered the marriage as all but settled. He had never had any other wish for his granddaughter's future; and though it gratified his pride that she should be admired and noticed wherever she went, and that many should seek her, he had made up his mind long ago who was to win her. I was more uneasy than he lest her head should be turned by the homage she received,

and not sorry when she made a slight illness an excuse for running away from London in the very midst of her success. I never saw her more amiable than she was during our journey to Morfa. She and Shafto were like two children, so glad to get out of the town. Their gaiety infected me—I never remember being so happy or feeling so good. How little I thought what was coming! Before we had been a day at Morfa, I happened to learn that a bad infectious fever was rife in one of the miners' villages near. I have a very great horror of fevers, a peculiar horror. I knew that Rosamond had a bad habit of going in and out of the poor people's houses, whatever they might have the matter with them, and that she usually heard of their ailments from your brother, who always seems to know when any one is ill. I thought it only a wise precaution to write and ask him not to tell her of the fever in the village, and I added, that if he were likely to be exposed to infection, he had better keep away from the hall for a time. I expect he thought me very interfering, for he never answered my letter, but rather exaggerated my caution—not only keeping away from Morfa, but avoiding us pointedly when we met at church, or on our rides. It was ill-judged, for it made Rosamond fancy that

something was wrong. I don't know how she found out my little *ruse* at last; I suppose she met your brother in some place where he could not avoid speaking to her, and that she questioned him. I am sure he would not have told her about the fever, if she had not asked some direct question. I dare say he made the best of it to her, but she chose to be bitterly angry with us all for keeping her in the dark; she insisted upon it, that the people had been neglected through our selfish fears, and she would go to Tanny Coied the very afternoon that she had heard there was illness there. She went from house to house wherever sickness and death had been; she tired herself out, and when she came home excited herself by quarrelling with all of us. The poor wilful child! she could not forgive what she considered interference on my part. To punish me, she would not even speak to poor Shafto, though he was innocent of all offence, and did not even understand what we were all disputing about. The next day she sickened. She would not allow she was very ill at first, but soon she could conceal it no longer; it was evident that she had taken the fever in its very worst form. She has youth on her side, otherwise there would be little hope. Poor child! poor child!"

"But, Lady Helen, I like her for going to see the sick people. It is right to run such risks. You don't blame mamma for going to Rosamond now that she is ill."

"No; I admire her, but I wonder at her, and at your father for permitting it."

"Hilary wished it so much—I understand why. He felt, or fancied, that he had led Rosamond into danger. That accounts for his extreme sorrow. I rather wondered at it before."

"*Extreme* sorrow? You were surprised, then, at the concern your brother showed?"

"I was surprised at his being so anxious to take mamma away into the neighbourhood of an infectious fever. I hope she will be safe. How terrible it would be if she were to be taken, or Hilary, or your son! Are not you very anxious about your son? Why did not you make him come away with you?"

"I could not have made him. And, my dear Janet, you should not put such terrible fears into my head. You certainly are not a judicious nurse for a nervous patient. Is not that your sister's gentle knock at the door? How good of her to come so early!"

It was Nesta, bringing two cups of tea, which, early as it was, she had prepared for Lady Helen and me, to refresh us after our night's watching. Lady Helen welcomed her kindly, and showed such a decided preference for her company, that I thought it better to leave them together, and slipped away to seek my father and cheer him with a good report of our guest.

CHAPTER XII.

“To wander all night long, without a sound,
About the fields my feet oft wandered once :
The larches tall and dark, which do ensconce
The little churchyard, in whose hallowed ground
Sleep half the simple friends my childhood knew.”

OWEN MEREDITH.

WE did not receive any letter by the midday post, and as Lady Helen was distressed at the prospect of prolonged suspense, my father invited her to stay with us till the next morning, when we might confidently reckon on a full report, from my mother, of the state in which she had found her patient. I hardly know how the day passed. Lady Helen found occupation for Nesta in waiting upon her, and I wished the hours away.

I took it as a proof of the reality of Lady Helen's anxiety, that she rose the next morning in time to join us at the breakfast-table before the post came in. When the postman's short quick rap was heard, Lady

Helen was more moved than any of us. Her lips turned white, and she caught hold of the table to steady herself. Since the boys had left home my mother had become a voluminous letter-writer. We had no fear that she would fail us. There was a thin letter to my father, which he patiently put aside, meaning, as I knew, to make it out painfully and slowly when he was alone. Another well-filled envelope was directed to me. Lady Helen sighed as she saw one closely written sheet drawn out after another. Compassionating her impatience, I began to read aloud.

“DEAR CHILDREN,—Hilary and I arrived safely, and are not the worse for our hasty journey. Please tell papa often how very well we both are. You perhaps all thought that dearest Hilary looked pale, and unlike himself, when you saw him. I fear you will have been making yourselves unhappy on his account, so I begin by assuring you that he is well, and that I don't at present see any reason to suppose that he has taken the fever.”

Lady Helen groaned, and I skipped several sentences, and, beginning on the next sheet, found myself in the midst of minute directions as to what we were to do if our father should be taken ill,

interspersed with cautions about the safe putting out at night of the gaslights and the kitchen-fire. At length, on the third sheet I saw Rosamond's name, and, beginning at the commencement of the sentence, I read boldly on:—

“It is very strange to be writing all these cautions to you, my darlings, while I sit watching by the side of Rosamond Lester's bed. She has been in a tranquil sleep for the last hour, while perhaps I am wanted at home; and yet, dear children—though I can hardly bear to think of your missing me, though I wonder every minute how everything looks at home—I cannot be sorry that I came, for I feel that I am wanted. I don't want to blame the people here. I am sure it is because they know no better; but it does go to my heart to find how little common sense and common self-denial have been shown by this poor child's nurses. It is very sad for a girl to have no mother. Poor Mrs. Western indeed has done what she could, but she is inexperienced, and at best, I should fear, a helpless person. I have had a very busy night and morning, but now, in the afternoon, I am resting, and enjoying this talk with you. Dear Hilary is, I trust, lying

down. I find he has not slept for several nights. I comforted him some hours ago, by giving him a favourable report of our invalid. This sweet sleep is a great gain. As I stooped over the bed just now she smiled, as if she were dreaming pleasantly. I think she will know me when she wakes, for even before she slept she used to turn towards me when I spoke, as if the sound of my voice pleased her. We must not be too sanguine, however. She is already very weak, and the doctors fear that, when the fever leaves her, she will sink from exhaustion. I am thankful to say I do not share that fear. I have told Hilary so. I trust I am not raising false hopes. Hilary is to stay at Morfa Mawr as long as I am here. That is an inexpressible comfort to me. I have just stolen softly into his room and found him sleeping. Rosamond Lester also still sleeps. I cannot close my letter with better news.

“Your most loving mother,

“ERNESTINE SCOTT.”

Lady Helen listened anxiously to every word, and was the first to speak when I ceased reading.

“I think—I trust—it is good news,” she repeated, more than once.

Nesta and I were eager in our assurances that it was, and we dwelt with hopefulness, which grew into certainty, as we talked, on every favourable point in our mother's letter. My father and Lady Helen shook their heads over some of our happy predictions, but I think they liked to hear them, and were somewhat infected by our hopefulness before the breakfast-hour was over.

During the course of the day, Lady Helen returned to her own home. She wished very much to take Nesta with her, but our father would not permit it. When he returned from afternoon school, and found our unexpected guest departed, he was inhospitable enough to express great satisfaction; and he made Nesta rather angry by predicting that we should not see her again, or hear more of the sudden affection she professed to have conceived for us.

In this, however, he was mistaken. During the following weeks, Lady Helen called at our house frequently; sometimes to take Nesta out for a drive into the country, oftener to sit an hour with us in the evening, and hear the news we had received in the morning's letters from Morfa. We usually read our mother's letters aloud a second time to our father in the evening. Lady Helen frequently contrived to be

present at this time, and showed such an eager interest in every scrap of Morfa news, that we felt it would be unkind not to let her share our mother's minute account of each day's progress. For some days the reports of Rosamond's health were very variable; now the symptoms were favourable, and then there had been a relapse, and life or death again hung in the balance. Our mother, through having to watch and guard her patient with intense un-resting anxiety—to fight, as it were, for her very life—was drawn day by day to regard her with a protecting motherly tenderness, such as she had never hitherto given to any one out of the home circle. The first letter which did not refer wholly to the concerns of the sick-room, was written a few days after the crisis of the fever had passed, when Rosamond's ultimate recovery was considered secure. I remember it, because it described persons and places with which we had much concern afterwards; and it interests me to look again at that first picture of them which my mother drew with delicate, minute touches for us:—

“ I have now been a fortnight at Morfa, but I must not tell my dear children how very long the time has seemed to me. To-day I went out for a little walk,

after the doctor had given a comfortable report of our dear child. I feel quite as if she were my child now; this fortnight of waiting on her and watching her, and trembling and praying for her, has made her mine. I hardly liked to leave her for an hour, but the doctor insisted on my taking the air; and I had promised Hilary to attend to his directions. Hilary wished to take me out for my first walk, but knowing how busy he is, and how little time he has to rest, I did not like to trouble him, and so managed to slip out alone. I have often fancied how I should feel if I ever went to Morfa again—if I ever saw again the hills and the woods and the fields that I have so often described to you; but, dear children, it just shows how foolish it is to picture things to one's self: I have seen them, and it has not been to me at all like what I fancied it would be. The air was very pleasant, and the smell of the flowers in the gardens refreshed me; but if I could have had my way, I would rather have walked down Baker Street and looked in upon you all, and assured myself that you are as well as you say, and found out what was being prepared for your father's supper to-night. I trust—I do trust—that everything is going on well with you at home; but I have promised not to be over-anxious, so now I

will tell you something about my walk. The house itself and the gardens in front are quite changed ; they do not recall any old recollections. Instead of the smooth bowling-green, with the two great mulberry-trees at the end, which used in my time to stretch down to the little river, the entire valley is now cut up into innumerable garden-beds. The hill-sides are laid out in terraces, with marble steps leading from one to another. It is all very grand, but I think our quiet garden, shut in with smooth green hills, was far prettier. I should hardly have known I was at Morfa while I stood at the front of the house, which looks eastward. On the western side, however, fewer changes have been made, and I soon found my way to a broad grass walk very much retired from all the rest of the garden, which used to be one of my favourite play-places when I was a child. It still has, I am glad to say, on one side the old hedge of hazel-trees dividing it from the kitchen-garden, and on the other the low ivy-covered wall I used to climb. From this wall one gets one's first view of the sea. I walked up and down for a quarter of an hour there to-day, and enjoyed extremely the smell of the sea and the feeling of the springy turf under my feet. It made me feel so young and enterprising, that I ventured to leave the

garden by a gate at the end of the walk, which, I remembered, led by a steep wooded descent to a well which we used to think held the sweetest and coolest water in the country side. I wondered whether the well would still be there, and whether I should find the tin cup and chain I used to be fond of letting down into the well and hauling up when I was a child. I found I was not so young as I once was when I tried to scramble down the hill-side. I wondered how I ever managed to dance down as I once did; but I dare say Nesta could do as much now. When I came out from among the trees to the little opening in the wood where the well is, I was startled (the place used to be so lonely) to find a visitor there before me. A young man about Hilary's height, but much slighter, was sitting on the edge of the well, actually amusing himself as I used to do, by drawing up water in my old tin cup, which was still fastened by its chain to the top of the well. He did not drink the water when he had drawn it up, he let it drip slowly back again from the vessel; and he did this several times over, as if he liked hearing the sound of the water-drops splashing into the well below. I used to do the same thing when I was very little, but it was strange to see a grown-up man

amusing himself in such an idle way. His back was turned to me, and as there was no space for me to come to the head of the well while he was there, I was obliged to stand still till he moved. I was determined to go to the well, for I spied a small jug lying on the grass, and I thought I would fill it with the very cold well-water, and take it to Rosamond. At last I grew tired of standing (it seemed as if he would never be tired of lifting up and letting down water), so I made a stir among the leaves, and then he started up and saw me. I felt sure—I don't know why—but the instant I saw his face I did feel sure, that he was Lady Helen's son. He seemed to know me, and came forward very pleasantly to ask after Miss Lester, and say how glad he was to see me out. He has a very pleasant manner which surprised me. I had made up my mind not to like him, because I fancy, from one or two things, that he is not a favourite with Hilary. Hilary is right, no doubt, yet I thought the earnest way in which he asked after Rosamond showed that he must have a good heart. He filled the pitcher with water for me, and would carry it to the house himself. He advised me not to climb the steep ascent again, but to prolong my walk by taking a winding road round the hill which

leads to a point in the valley, where, he said, I should see the new church which Mr. Lester (by Hilary's advice) is building for the Tann y Coied miners. Mr. Carr showed me the road, so we had quite a long walk and talk together. Like Lady Helen, he talks more openly and more about his own thoughts and feelings than people generally do. I don't mean that he told me about any particular feelings of his own, only in a general way he spoke as if he did not think any one could be really happy, and even as if he were not quite sure that we ought to rejoice so very much, for Rosamond's own sake, that her life is likely to be spared. I said I was sure it would not have been spared unless it was really good for her to live; and then I repeated what I have often heard your father say, that he could not think it right to look forward so exclusively to the joys of heaven that we could not receive thankfully the good things our Father has prepared for us here.

"When I mentioned the joys of heaven, he looked surprised, and said, 'Oh, you misunderstand me. I was not thinking of heaven, but of throwing off the weariness of life—its littleness, its doubts, its noisy strife; and of sleeping peacefully in some such spot as that.'

"We had come in sight of the new church as he spoke, and he stopped to point out to me the field sloping up the hill-side, and still full of wild flowers, which has been marked out for the future churchyard. As we looked, he told me some story about a young poet (I had never heard his name before) who used to say, during the last few months of his life, that he longed to feel the flowers growing over him. I told him I thought that a very foolish speech for a poet to make, for he must have known that *he* could never feel the flowers: *he* would not be in the grave while his body was being turned into flowers; he would have gone to God to render his account. I said I never liked to hear people speak in that way of death, as if the grave and what became of the body were any important part of it.

"Mr. Carr looked at me earnestly as I spoke, as if he wanted to see if I really felt what I said; then he made some answer about envying people who could speak certainly—who felt as if they knew. I was too much surprised to answer. Is it not sad, dear children, to think of a man as old as Hilary, who is said to have such great talents too, being still ignorant on such important points—doubtful about simple plain truths that he might have learned in the

catechism, and heard over and over again at church ever since he was a child? I felt very sorry for Mr. Carr as we walked the rest of the way rather silently together. He does not look as bright and happy as a young person ought to look, or talk as sensibly as one would expect; and yet there is certainly something nice about him.

"But here I am at the end of my paper. In looking back I am surprised to see how much I have written about Mr. Carr. You will not think it tedious, because you like to hear every little thing that interests me. He has interested me, he is such a very different person from what I expected to see."

The next day's letter contained the following passage:—

"I have had such a delightful walk with Hilary. The dear boy pretended to be jealous because I had taken my first walk with Mr. Carr; so I gave myself a longer holiday than I should otherwise have done, and let him take me down to the sea-shore. It certainly is a great treat to me to walk with Hilary, and how it did put me in mind of old times! Hilary is just the height that my dear father was. I have to

stretch up my hand to reach his arm now, and he has the same way of walking—the light springing step and the habit of looking about as he walked, that my father had. On our way to the shore, Hilary called an old shepherd from a field to remind him to fetch in a flock of sheep from Salt Marshes before the tide turned. I did not remember the old man's face, but he recognised me, and began to lament over the old times, as elderly people naturally do. He said the place had never looked like itself since the old master died, and he had had no comfort in it till young Mr. Hilary came three years ago, to put them in mind, by every word he spoke, and every look he looked, of them that were gone. He would have said more, but Hilary cut him short, rather roughly, I feared.

“‘Come, Griffith,’ he said, ‘enough of that. I have told you twenty times over that I am no more master here than you are. Mr. Lester is your master and mine, and you are an ungrateful old humbug if you pretend that you have anything to complain of. Go back to your work, and take care those sheep are safe on the uplands in less than half an hour.’

“When we were out of the old man's hearing,

Hilary spoke gravely to me about not encouraging the people to remark upon his likeness to his grandfather, or to speak as if he had any special right to be at Morfa, or were likely to remain long there. I asked him where else he thought of going, and he said, "the further away from Morfa the better." Then he began to walk over the sandy waste land that leads down to the sea, with such quick strides that I could not have kept up with him, if he had not now and then stopped to knock off the head of a thistle with his stick, or to trample down a dandelion-flower that would soon have been sending its seeds into the cultivated fields—just as my father never forgot to do, however deeply he might be thinking. Of course, it made me unhappy to see him disturbed, and to hear him talk of going far away from Morfa. I wondered whether it was any pain to him to walk over fields that had belonged to his forefathers, and be, as he had said, a servant there instead of the master. I began to turn over in my mind all the comforting things I might say to him, but by the time we reached the shore, the disturbed look had left his face, and he was his kind self again. He made me sit down in a sheltered spot on the dry, white sand, and we had, what we used to call when you were

children, a Sunday talk. Ah! dear children, there is no happiness in the world like what a mother feels when her grown-up son, who has been long away from her, talks to her out of the fulness of his heart, and she feels that there is nothing in it that need divide him and her; that though he may be stronger and wiser than she is, he is as much her own, as good, and as true as he was when he was a little child. I can't tell you all Hilary said, but you will like to hear a little. He blamed himself for having been so much disturbed, and for burdening my mind with cares for his future, when we ought both to be too much absorbed in gratitude to God for sparing Rosamond Lester's life to think of anything else. He said he had not thought of anything else till that old man's speech had wakened a selfish pain, which he hoped he had conquered. From the hour when I had told him we might consider the danger over, till then, he had felt as if he were treading on air; everything out of doors—the wind and the sea, and the waterfalls, seemed to be shouting for joy. He said I could not understand how painful it was to be dragged back to thoughts of himself, and of how little he really had to do with Morfa, and with the people whose lives he has shared for the last four years.

"When we had finished talking about Rosamond, he made me tell him how I liked being at Morfa. He feared that the sight of the old places might have brought painful regrets for the old times. I assured him, as I now tell you, dear children, that it has not brought any pain to me. I used to think it would. Now I could laugh at myself, and wonder that I never found out before how much better and dearer the present times are than the past. I told Hilary, as I once before told you, Janet, what a trouble it was to me when he was born, to think that he would never live at Morfa, and how I fancied it was impossible for him to be happy in any other place. Now I begin to see how little happiness depends on outward things; as one gets older, as one sees the end, one learns to smile at the violent wishes of one's youth, and to see that, after all, it has been easy enough to do without a thing that once seemed necessary to one's very life. Dear Hilary put his arm round my neck and kissed me as I said this. He told me I had comforted him, and done him more good than I knew. He would remember my words, and try to believe that a time would come when he, too, should smile at the violent wish of his youth.

"As we were leaving the beach, Hilary pointed

out to me a grassy ledge, nearly at the top of a steep rock, on the southern side of the bay, and told me that Rosamond Lester once climbed up to it to bring down a poor little mountain lamb that had fallen from the top and broken its leg. To look at the steep sides of the rock, one would think only a sea-bird could reach the ledge, but Hilary assures me that Rosamond not only climbed up, but brought down the lamb in her arms. Hilary was riding on the sands, at some distance from the head, when he saw something white fluttering half way up the rock. He tried to persuade himself that it could not be a person's dress, and happily he did not get near enough to recognise Rosamond till she was within a few yards of the bottom. He must have been much frightened, however ; for even while we were talking, the recollection of the danger she had been in, agitated him so, that he put his hands over his face and shuddered.

"Nesta will like to know what became of the lamb. I asked, and Hilary told me that Rosamond carried it home and cared for it till it was quite well ; then she took no more notice of it, and it was sent away to the Morfa Bar farm-house. It is now a great lazy sheep, Hilary says, and it has a troublesome habit of

following him about wherever he goes. He calls it troublesome, but he confesses that he always has a lump of rock-salt for it in his pocket, and that he has never left off the habit of feeding and caressing it. Is not that like Hilary? It would be impossible to him to leave off being kind to any creature he had once protected, however ugly, or old, or troublesome it grew."

My next extract is from a letter dated a week later :—

"I have been thinking, Janet, how much easier it is for some men to be amiable when they have to do with women, than when they are in each other's company. Mr. Carr, now, is really always very pleasant when he and I are together. To me he is almost humble, and when I am obliged to find fault with things he says, and to give him a little lecture, he takes it so prettily, as if I had a right (as I have not) to find fault. I cannot say, however, that his manner to Hilary pleases me; indeed, to tell the truth, I quite dread being in the same room with Mr. Carr and Hilary. They always *will* talk, and yet they never by any chance get into a conversation that does not become an argument. Hilary means

well, I know, yet I must confess there is a want of kindness in his way of treating Mr. Carr, that I cannot understand. He will sometimes fix on some remark that Mr. Carr has made (a foolish, high-flown speech, perhaps), and go on all the evening talking about it, showing its absurdity in his downright, matter-of-fact way, till I do not wonder that Mr. Carr grows contemptuous and angry. When he is really roused (and I must allow that he bears a great deal without disturbing himself about it) he can say very cutting, scornful things. The words often don't seem to mean much, or at least I don't catch their meaning; it is the contemptuous expression on his face that distresses me. To-day, I am sorry to say, they had one of these foolish quarrels. It began about a little bit of stone wall that divides two fields behind Morfa Bar farm-house. A briar-rose had crept up this wall, and quite a garden of wild flowers had taken root in a lodgment of earth on the top. Mr. Carr pointed out the flowers to me one day, when we were walking together, and he stood still for more than ten minutes, counting the different colours on that one piece of old wall. He said it was worth all the gardens at Morfa Mawr, and then, in a laughing way, he tried to coax me into making a

solemn promise that I would not betray the existence of this wild garden to Hilary.

“I did not mention it, for I really forgot all about it ; but Hilary’s sharp eyes spied it out, and, of course, he set a man to work immediately to clear away the weeds. Mr. Carr reproached him with what he called this barbarism, when they met to-day at dinner, and they had a long discussion. I felt that Hilary had done quite right ; for, as he says, the flowers would not have stayed on the wall ; they would have sent their seeds all over the fields, and cost the farmer I don’t know how much labour to root them out. But I wish he had justified his own doings without expressing such disdain for Mr. Carr’s taste, and showing so plainly that he thought his arguments in favour of the weeds because they are beautiful, not only very foolish, but even selfish. Mr. Carr did not say much in answer, but what he did say pained and puzzled me extremely. He spoke as if he thought it were a question of right and wrong—something to do with religion—but such an odd sort of religion ; I could not understand him. He spoke of people making a display of building churches for the service of God, while, by destroying all beauty in the world, and looking at it only as a place to make


money in, they were rendering the true worship impossible. He implied that we all worshipped ignorantly—'we knew not what;' and that he, because he spends his time in mooning about the country admiring the colours of wild flowers, and the damp stains on old walls, is a more religious man than Hilary, and in a better state of mind. He has a strange way of quoting words from the Bible, so as to make them mean just the contrary to what one has always thought they meant. It is very distressing to me, and I wish every day that your father were here to set us all right. My uncle takes no part in these discussions. I am afraid it amuses him rather to see the two young men grow angry with each other. In his heart he must agree with Hilary, but I think he has the same sort of admiration for Mr. Carr that he used to have for Lady Helen in the old days, when a word from her would make him do anything."

The next letter began :—

"To-day is to be a great day. The doctors have given leave for Rosamond to be removed from her bedroom to a sitting-room on the same floor. She is to be wheeled across the passage in an arm-chair, so as to have as little fatigue as possible. Mrs. Western

and I have just finished dressing her ; she looks very weak, but I think even prettier than when she was in health. Her short hair curls in such pretty dark rings all over her head, and her eyes look so very large and bright. She must naturally be very energetic ; even now, so feeble as she is, she speaks and moves in a quick, impetuous way. Often when I am waiting on her, she lifts up her face and gives me such a vehement kiss, that I am not surprised at her lying back quite exhausted after it. When she says ‘Thank you!’ it is said with all her heart, with an emphasis that makes the two words mean more than a hundred of another person’s. All the servants in the house, and the poor people round, love her. It is pretty to see what a festival they make of this first day of her leaving her room. The servants seem not to know how to make the house look beautiful enough. And as for Hilary—but that is Hilary’s rap at the door ; he is come to wheel the arm-chair to the boudoir. A little shake or fright might be very injurious to Rosamond just now, and, of course, there is no one so thoroughly to be trusted as Hilary, so strong and so careful.


“It is evening. Rosamond is once more in bed, and I have leisure to finish my letter. I have been



reading over what I wrote this morning. How little one knows at the beginning of a day how it will look at the end! This has not been quite such a bright day as it ought to have been—at least, not to me. I am vexed with myself, for something I have done has annoyed Hilary. You will remember what I told you about my visit to the well, and that Mr. Carr good-naturedly carried a jug of water for me up the hill. Since that day he has always brought or sent me that same jug full of cool well-water, and it has been very useful, for Rosamond likes that water better than any other. I might have asked a servant to supply me with water from the well, but I let Mr. Carr bring it, because he seemed to like doing so. I may have been wrong, but I did not know it at the time. It came to be an understood thing between Mr. Carr and me, that he was to render us that one little service, and the water came regularly till this morning, when I fancied he had forgotten it. Rosamond missed her morning draught, and I had planned to send for it as soon as she was settled in her room. However, the first thing we all noticed in the boudoir was a very pretty basket standing on Rosamond's work-table. It was filled with the prettiest, greenest moss, and buried

in it was the little jug, so full of water that the moss dipped in it. It was like a miniature well—so fresh and cool, it made one long to drink. Rosamond was much pleased, and, with more strength than I thought she had, she sat upright in her chair, lifted the jug out of the basket, and began to pour some water into a glass. Then she stopped to say how much good it did her, and how kind she thought the person who had remembered her whim about this water every day. I fancied she looked at Hilary as she spoke, and I said, as I was surely bound to do, that she had to thank Mr. Carr for this little kindness, and that I did think it considerate in him to be so punctual, for he was not naturally a thoughtful person. There was nothing startling, I am sure, in my way of speaking; but it was ill-judged in me to speak to Rosamond at all while she was holding the jug in her hand. As might have been expected, her strength failed suddenly. Her poor weak fingers lost their hold on the handle. Down came the jug on the floor, and the water was splashed all over her dress. The accident caused some confusion. Rosamond's dress had to be changed, and by the time this was done she was so much fatigued, that she could not enjoy the fresh room. She had not a word for

her grandfather or Mr. Carr when they came to see her, but lay, with her eyes shut nearly all day, and cannot, I fear, have benefited much by the change of scene. The worst to me, however, is, that Hilary is disposed to blame both Mr. Carr and me. The accident in itself was a mere trifle; yet it must have seemed serious to Hilary, or he never would have spoken as he did to me. Stay, I do not mean that he said anything disrespectful; he only expressed strongly his opinion that I was to blame in admitting Mr. Carr to so much intimacy. He did not know, I am sure, how much his saying so would pain me. Hilary has just been with me. Oh, my dear children, what a wonderfully good, tender heart he has! He cannot forgive himself for what he said to me to-day. One would think, to hear him talk, that he had said something very wrong, whereas it was nothing. Surely, as I have been telling him, he had a right to express his own opinion. He says, No: he had no right to have a wrong opinion, and it must be a wrong opinion that blamed me. I have had quite a task to comfort him. He has promised me to go to bed and to think no more about it; but I heard the front door close just now, and I fear he has gone out to wander about in the open air. I know he has



a very tender conscience, but I do think it strange that he should have been so much agitated by what happened to-day. He spoke as if he had hardly been himself since that unlucky accident. I trust he is not overworking himself, or that he is not beginning in the fever."

That is the last letter which I remember reading out loud in our quiet evening conclave. The day after its arrival we were surprised by a second invasion from Morfa Mawr, which revolutionised our little world as completely as the first had done.

On coming home from our evening walk, Nesta and I learned that Lady Helen and Mr. Lester, who had come up from Morfa to spend a day or two with her in London, had called and spent an hour with our father during our absence. It was a real disappointment to Nesta and me to lose this chance of hearing the latest news of our mother and Rosamond; for our father was never a good person from whom to glean information at second hand, even when he was in his most talkative mood. On this evening our close cross-questioning seemed to worry him even more than usual. He was not cross, but he was evidently preoccupied. After prayers he

took me with him into the den to read over some exercises, and when my task was finished, I did not wish him good-night, for I saw he was by that time in a mood to talk to me.

"Janet," he began, when I had settled myself in my favourite place on a pile of dictionaries at his feet, "what a strange thing it is to see how one character acts upon another in the same way all through life. I have been accustomed to think myself a tolerably firm person, yet to-day I have fallen again under the influence of a will which, in old times, I found to be stronger than my own. A person, who has no right to control me, has come and informed me quietly of plans which he has formed for the disposal of myself and my family during the next few months, and I have found myself helplessly acquiescing in them. It is very humiliating: it shows how little years have improved me."

"Papa, what has Mr. Lester persuaded you to do?"

"Ah! you are anxious, and want to bring me to the point at once, Janet. Now, I make a long preamble, because I am doubtful how you will look when the tale is told. Come, I will take courage.

My Janet is a sensible lassie; she knows that when a thing is done it is done, and that there is no use in making the worst of it."

"I will make the best of it."

"Thank you, my wise child, my counsellor. Well, Janet, you shall hear the whole story from beginning to end—my hopes first and then the disappointment.

"Since your mother left us I have been constantly thinking how we might gain from her hasty journey some advantage for her and you. She likes Morfa, and if she could have some of you with her, I think a prolonged visit there would do her good. I had planned to write to Hilary, and tell him to look out for some pleasant farmhouse near the sea, to which your mother might have gone as soon as Miss Lester could spare her. Then, as soon as the vacation commenced, I should have sent Nesta and Charlie to join her there, while you and I—"

"Well, papa?"

"Ah, Janet! that was the cream of the plan. I thought I might have realised a day-dream in which I have indulged for several years. I meant to have taken you with me to Edinburgh to visit my relatives and old friends there. I should like you to see Dr. Allison and his family. They, and one or

two others I could name, would not like your dark face the less because it is so much like mine. Besides, Dr. Allison is, you know, a celebrated oculist, and, knowing something of our family constitution, and having averted the evil I dread from some of us who were threatened with it, he fancies—But I don't agree with him," my father said, interrupting himself, and putting his hand to his eyes. "In my case there is nothing to be done. Patience and submission—nothing but patience and submission."

"But everything ought to be tried," I said. "Papa, if that was your plan, I will not make the best of your giving it up."

"Stay, Janet; *that* is not the project from which I have been dissuaded; I had given up all thoughts of your and my journey to Scotland before I saw Mr. Lester. Read that letter, Janet, and you will understand why."

It was a short letter from Charlie's college tutor, enclosing the bills for the Easter term. I should not have been much wiser for looking at the items of a few words in my father's large scrawling hand at the end, had I not noted that the sum total was a hundred pounds more than he had calculated upon. I understood my father well enough to know that

any expression of indignation against Charlie would only aggravate his pain. I could not think of any reasonable excuse to make for Charlie's conduct, so I suppressed all remark upon it.

"Will this make it quite impossible for you to travel to Scotland, or to take lodgings at Morfa?" I asked.

"Quite impossible."

"Could it not be managed for Nesta and Charlie to go to Morfa, and stay at Morfa Bawr with Hilary, while mamma remains at the Great House? There would only be the expense of the journey, and it would be such a delight to mamma. You and I could be happy at home together—very happy. You know you have promised to teach me Hebrew; I have quite made up my mind to learn, however much Mr. Armstrong may laugh at me."

"Well, Janet, that was just the arrangement I had thought out; I had determined that you and I, the two strong ones, should take the necessary privation on our broad shoulders, and smooth the way for the others as well as we could. I honour you, you see, my counsellor, by giving you the hardest lot. Do you like such honour? It is what God often gives to His dearest children."

"Yes, I do, I do. Papa, that is an excellent plan—you must not change it."

"But I have changed it, and I want you to help me to find out how I came to be so foolish."

"Never mind that now. Let me hear what you and Mr. Lester have plotted."

"Nothing very formidable. I have given up my intention of sending Charlie and Nesta to Morfa, and at Mr. Lester's and Lady Helen's joint request, I have promised that they shall accompany Lady Helen to her country house in Norfolk, and stay with her two months, while your mother prolongs her visit at Morfa."

"I wonder what makes Lady Helen and Mr. Lester wish this?"

"Mr. Lester is anxious to keep your mother at Morfa, and Lady Helen away, as long as his granddaughter's health requires that she should be humoured; he thinks your mother will be content to remain from home if her family is dispersed, and that Lady Helen will bear the solitude of Broadlands better if she has companions to amuse her. She professes to have taken a great liking to Nesta."

"And Nesta has a sort of liking for her. I dare say that she and Charlie will be happy at Broadlands."

I don't see why it should not prove a wise arrangement. You and I shall still be together. We will make the best of it, papa."

"Thank you; but you suppose that you were forgotten. Lady Helen said she hoped that you would join your brother and sister at Broadlands after the school holidays began: she knew I could not spare my secretary in term time, she said."

"Did she suppose I would leave you alone in the house?"

"No, Mr. Lester invited me to spend my holiday at Morfa with your mother."

"To travel down to Wales alone?—what an idea! I would not let you," I exclaimed.

My father sighed gently; "Everybody does not watch me as closely as you do, Jenny; and you know what I feel about concealing one's infirmities—I mean refraining from troubling one's neighbours with useless complaints about them. Perhaps you, and I, and George Armstrong, are the only people who quite understand how little I am to be trusted to take care of myself. Well, there is consolation in that thought, for before the day of total darkness comes, my practice in helping myself under difficulties will have prepared me for it."

"But you will not run needless risks?"

"No, and I agree that travelling alone would be a needless risk. Since I can't afford to take these eyes with me," touching mine, "I will stay at home. Now, go to bed, dear child."

I went, more full of my father's last words than of anything else he had told me. As I slowly mounted the stairs, a happy thought suggested itself to my mind.

We had been visiting Mrs. Wilton that evening, and she had entertained us with a long account of an accident that had befallen her son, a boy of ten years old, and with lamentations that, in consequence of it, he would be kept prisoner to the house during the rest of the half-year, and lose all the benefit of his school lessons. She wished very much, she said, that she could hear of a tutor or governess who would undertake to carry on her son's studies till the end of the term. The difficulty of the case seemed to be that Master Wilton had a will of his own, and his mother feared that while he continued too much out of health to attend the regular school classes, he would strongly object to receive instruction from any tutor she was likely to find for him.

Now the young gentleman and I chanced to be

firm friends. I had often helped him to prepare his lessons, and, girl though I was, I knew he had considerable respect for my scholarship. I had no fear but that we should get on well as teacher and pupil; and I felt sure that Mrs. Wilton would be delighted to have my help. Why should not I offer to act as Arthur Wilton's teacher till the end of the half-year, and so earn enough money to enable my father to take the journey to Scotland on which he had set his heart? Before I reached the top stair, my thought had become a fixed purpose, I had seen exactly how I should carry it out, and resolved that my father should know nothing of what I was doing till I was able to place the money I had earned in his hands. The thought made me so light-hearted that I was able to represent the new plans to Nesta under a much brighter aspect than I had seen them a few minutes before, and by dwelling long, and chiefly on the happiness which the success of my scheme would certainly bring me, I succeeded in reconciling her to the thought of leaving me alone at home while she went out into the world.

CHAPTER XIII.

" 'Tis the place, and all around it, as of old, the curlews call,
Dreary gleams about the moorland flying over Locksley Hall ;
Locksley Hall, that in the distance overlooks the sandy tracts,
And the hollow ocean-ridges roaring into cataracts."

As soon as letters could be received from my mother and Charlie, my father had the comfort of finding that his plan received the fullest approbation from both.

My mother was glad that Nesta should enjoy the pleasures of a country visit, and Charlie hailed joyfully any arrangement that put off the evil day of explanation with my father. My own private scheme prospered too. Mrs. Wilton received my proposition gratefully, and my father gave me permission to spend my mornings during Nesta's absence at Mrs. Wilton's house, without troubling himself to ask any explanation of my request to do so.

Lady Helen fixed her departure for the fourth day after Mr. Lester's visit, so that the hours which drifted Nesta and me to our first parting were so full of occupation, that we had no time to grow sad over the thought. Nesta's resemblance to our mother appeared in all the wonderful little arrangements she made to secure those who were left behind from missing anything of her usual service.

Lady Helen called for Nesta early in the day fixed for their journey, and an hour after they had left me I betook myself to Mrs. Wilton's house to begin my first day's teaching. I was glad to get away from the solitariness of home, and to have my thoughts diverted from mourning over Nesta's absence, so I entered on my new occupation with a good heart. I do not deny that I met with some unlooked-for difficulties; but, on the whole, I got on as well as I had expected, and never had any cause to regret my undertaking. My pupil was a clever boy, and anxious not to fall behind his classmates. When he found that my explanations really did make his work clearer to him than he had ever found it before, he left off throwing obstacles in the way of his own progress, and resigned himself to his fate with a better grace than might have been

expected from a schoolboy 'compelled to submit to the indignity of being taught by a woman.

My first afternoon's labour enabled me to meet my father on his return from school with a consciousness of having been well employed, and with the bright spirits that always attend such a feeling.

My father's surprise at my gaiety at the conclusion of such a trying day, and Mr. Armstrong's evident approbation of it (he thought I was making a great effort to be gay for my father's sake), afforded me much secret satisfaction. I went to bed reflecting on the still greater surprise I had in store for him, and bravely shutting out with this thought the longing for Nesta's sweet presence, which would come on this first night that we had ever slept under separate roofs.

Nesta's first letter to me was written on the evening of her journey; it is very like herself:—

“DEAREST LOVE,—Do you remember a story you read aloud to me when I was making the skirts of those spotted lilac muslin dresses we wore two summers ago? I hope you do, for, if so, it will save me a great deal of description in this letter. I quite forget the title of the book, and everything about it,

except an account of the heroine's visit to an old country house, and of her being placed to sleep at night in an out-of-the-way, oddly furnished room, where she fancies all sorts of horrors are going to happen to her. You will remember the story, and from it, you will be able to imagine what I should be feeling to-night if I had not taken out this sheet of paper and fixed my eyes upon it, and resolved to think about you, and nothing else. Since I wrote that sentence I have broken my resolution ; I have lifted my eyes from the paper and looked round. Yes ; this is a very out-of-the-way strange-looking room, and there is something strange and forlorn in the appearance of the whole house. There are no carpets on the broad slippery oak stairs ; the balusters are too large for one's hand to hold, and, I think, but I am not sure, that the cornices have grinning faces carved upon them. The passages are very wide and windy ; the doors are mostly covered with faded green baize, quite worn out at the edges, so that when they slip from one's hand they fill the whole house with sound : a whisper however will suffice for that. The house has been quiet so long that the very walls and the floors are tired of silence, they don't know how to make enough of a noise when

they have one, but go on repeating it for ever. My bedroom is quieter than the rest of the house, at least the boards don't creak *much* as I walk about, and the door shuts easily; but when I listen I can hear a very dismal noise, caused (so the housemaid tells me) by the wind moaning in a great alarm-bell that hangs in a turret in the roof. A stray little breeze must have got inside this bell one windy night a hundred years ago; it can't find its way out again, so it has been making that little fretful moan ever since. I wish it would go to sleep for one night.

"Three steps lead down from the passage into my room. I confess it feels very like going down into a well. The walls are panelled and hung with dark Chinese-pattern paper. The chimney-piece is of dark carved oak. I can't make out all its oddities by this light, but I can see that the supports are two mermaids, with battered faces, shining black bodies, and scaly tails. There is an Indian cabinet against the wall, and the article of furniture that is serving me for a desk is a great oak chest—perhaps the very one that swallowed up 'Lovel's bride:' it, too, is curiously carved, and has a grotesque open-mouthed face, looking at me from its centre. Now, beloved,

you know the sort of place I am writing in ; so I will begin to tell you the events of the day.

“I wonder how you have got through this whole day without me to look after you? When I had left you this morning, and we were settled in the railway carriage, and had started on our journey, I began to think rather dolefully of all the little things in which you and dear papa would miss me, and to vex myself lest I should have left anything undone that I might have done to save you trouble. These thoughts made me rather sorrowful, and I was obliged to look diligently out of the window for more than an hour to prevent Lady Helen asking what was the matter with my eyes. We left the railway train at three o'clock, and drove to a little village inn, where Lady Helen's carriage and servants were to meet us. Lady Helen said she was too tired to continue our journey at once, so we stayed and dined at the inn. After dinner Lady Helen laid down on a sofa and slept, and I strolled round the sunny inn garden, full of broad white lilies and full-blown cabbage-roses and lavender, and then into the village street, where everything was so quiet that I thought all the inhabitants of the place must have settled themselves to sleep for a hundred years. We did

not leave the inn till sunset ; there was more look of life about the village then. I think I shall always remember how the long straggling street looked as we drove through—the children playing before the open doors of the houses, the women, with their arms folded in their aprons, leaning on the gates of the little gardens, the men sauntering home from their work in the fields, the groups of people leaning over the little bridge at the bottom of the village. I shall always fancy Brancaster a summer sunshiny place, where it never rains or is cold.

“It soon grew too dark to see much from the window, but the drive in the carriage was the happiest part of the day. Lady Helen was very kind, and talked a great deal to me. She described the first journey she had taken on this road, soon after she married, when she was longing to know what her new home was like. She said *that* was the only time she ever wished the way shorter, or thought with anything but pain of the end of it. This house must have proved an unhappy home to her, or surely, its being less grand than she expected could not have made her dislike it as she does. She told me that she always contrives to arrive after dark, because it spares her the shock of seeing at once how

dilapidated the place looks. Her son is fond of Broadlands; he spent his childhood there, while Lady Helen and her husband were travelling abroad. Only think, Lady Helen left her son when he was two years old, and did not see him again for ten years! It was quite dark, so I asked her to tell me about their meeting, and whether they were not very happy to be together again? She laughed, and said that she had looked forward eagerly to seeing her son, and pictured to herself what he would be like, and what he would be to her. She was so excited that her friends dreaded the meeting for her; but when the time came, and an awkward ugly boy was pushed into the room by his tutor, she was so shocked at the sight that she could not help covering her face with her hands.

“ Her son snatched his hand away from his tutor, rushed out of the house into the garden, and could not be persuaded to come in again for the rest of the day. The next time she saw him, she said she made a great effort to be motherly, and forced herself to kiss him; but instead of being pleased, he threw himself on the ground and cried for hours. Jenny, I could have cried when she told me this. Can't you fancy how he had been longing for the meeting, and wondering what it would be to have a mother like

other children, and how Lady Helen's 'effort to be motherly' almost broke his heart? Yet I think Lady Helen does love her son. She is at least anxious about his future, and sorry that he does not confide in her. She could not help complaining to me about his reserve, and his unwillingness to be advised or guided by her. I wonder whether it would be possible for any one to make them really understand and love each other. What a happy person that would be!—what good it might do them both! It must be some one who loved and admired him very much, and had faith and love enough always to see the best in her, and not to be thrown back either by the strange things she says of herself or the little hard speeches that so frighten me. I can fancy such a person—brave and gentle. I wonder, will Rosamond Lester be all that? I have flown off to Rosamond Lester because Lady Helen did, but I shall not tell you what she said of her, because it is too late to begin on a fresh subject. When we drove up to the house, it was dark enough to satisfy Lady Helen, however anxious she might be to see nothing. I have seen just as much as I have described to you. Good night, beloved—I long for morning to come and show me this unknown world more plainly."

Nesta's next letter told of Charlie's safe arrival at Broadlands, and of the high favour with which he was received by his hostess. A week later introduced fresh actors on the scene, and enlarged my knowledge of life at Broadlands.

“DEAREST JANET,—I wonder whether it has been raining with you as heavily as it has done here all day ; if it has, however, I can answer for it, that you have not noticed it as much as we have. You know we were to have gone to-day to call on Sir John and Lady Moorsom, county neighbours of Lady Helen's, who came to see her the day Charlie and I walked to the beach and were late for luncheon. Lady Helen was sorry that I did not see them, and a little annoyed with us for being late. Since then, she has talked so much of them, and described so often the beautiful old house, Deepdale Grange, where they live, that I became anxious to see it, and felt foolishly disappointed, when, on getting up this morning, I saw dripping trees, and a wet lawn strewn with the blown flowers of the June roses which ought to have lasted a month longer. They lay like rose-coloured flakes of snow all over the garden, and the sky looked as if it meant to go on raining for ever.

Lady Helen pitied me for my disappointment, and said it did her good to see any one young enough to set her heart on having a drive, but when she had said this she went off to her boudoir with her letters, and left Charlie and me to our own devices. Unluckily, Charlie was as much unhinged as I, not about the rain, but on account of some letter he received from Cambridge this morning. He put on his old "Let me alone" look, which we know too well, settled himself with a book in an arm-chair, and would not speak to me the whole morning. I could not, I am ashamed to confess, think of a single thing to do. I wandered from one window to another, watching the rain-drops dripping from the trees, and wishing that it were luncheon time. Ah! Janet, do you not wonder at me and despise me? Well, in excuse for myself that it was not entirely idleness that made me so slow to discover employment this rainy morning, it was partly a curious restless feeling. I can't explain it to you, for I never felt it before in my life; it was as if something were going to happen that concerned me so particularly that I must do nothing but wait and expect it. It was my foolish fancy, and as far as I know, nothing came for all my waiting but luncheon time. After

luncheon, Charlie went out for a walk in the pouring rain, and Lady Helen invited me to her boudoir, where a fire had been lighted, and made me play and sing to her for a long time ; then, seeing I was cold, she told me to bring a stool to the fire and settle myself near her sofa for a fire-side talk. She was in very bright spirits, and she soon began to talk, as she always does when she is happy, about Morfa and the Lesters, about their great riches and the high position in the country which the inheritor of such riches might aspire to, if he were an ambitious and clever man. Then her son's name came into the talk, and she let me see plainly her hope that he would one day be the owner of Morfa. I ventured to ask if he and Rosamond were engaged ; I hope it was not over inquisitive, Janet, I don't think Lady Helen was annoyed. She said she believed not—she did not think her son had spoken to Rosamond yet ; he was proud, and the fact of her being such a great heiress would make him slow to speak. He knew her wishes and Mr. Lester's, and yet he had never set her heart at rest by confessing that his own agreed with them. She wished he would for once confide in her. If she could but see her son married to Rosamond Lester, and master of Morfa Mawr, she

said she would forget all the pains and disappointments of her past life in that crown of joy. Crown of joy was the expression she used, Janet; it set me wondering what I should like to have for a crown of joy to end my life with; and while I built my castle in the air, Lady Helen left off talking and we fell into such deep silence that we were both startled by the sound of carriage wheels coming up to the front-door. 'Who can it be?' Lady Helen exclaimed impatiently. 'Who can be coming to us through the rain?' She got up, walked to the window, and walked back, looking disturbed and anxious. I knew quite well what was going to happen, but I said nothing; I felt that it was absurd of me to be so very sure. A moment or two afterwards we heard footsteps coming up the stairs, the door opened, and a tall gentleman entered, who proved to be, as I expected, Mr. Carr. It was odd that I should know he had come, was it not? but then Lady Helen had been talking of him just before we heard the carriage. He walked into the room quite quietly, not in the eager way people usually have when they return home after an absence. It was more as if he had just come in from a walk. 'How are you, mother?' he said, in the most matter-of-fact way you can

imagine. Lady Helen gave him a long look before she spoke, and her eyes grew large and so eager as if she wanted to find out something from his face; then she seized both his hands, and said, 'Shafto, what does this unexpected return mean?—tell me at once. Have you brought me any good news?' 'I have brought you nothing but myself,' he answered. 'Then why have you left Morfa? What brought you home?' He drew both his hands from hers. 'My own wish; not, I assure you, any vain hope that my company might be agreeable to you, or that you would welcome me.' A very scornful hard expression came over his face as he spoke. I should have taken a dislike to him then, if he had not, the instant afterwards, seemed so sad and disappointed that I was sorry for him. He turned quite away from us, drew a chair to the fire, and began spreading out his hands to the flames with a languid pre-occupied air, as if he did not expect any one to take further notice of him. Lady Helen sat down too, but I could see by the way in which she squeezed her hands together, that she was trying to keep in angry words. 'I am very glad to see you, Shafto,' she said at last. 'You cannot doubt that; I was merely anxious to be assured there was no special

reason for your sudden appearance. Mr. Lester told me that you intended to stay at Morfa all the summer.' 'Did he?' Mr. Carr answered. 'Then he must have known more about my intentions than I did myself. I never could have meant to stay at Morfa all the summer—certainly not.'

"As Mr. Carr said this, Lady Helen got up, walked to the side of the room where he was sitting, and stood behind his chair. 'Shafto,' she began, in a trembling, anxious tone, 'tell me one thing; set me at ease; have you quarrelled with my friends?'

"He turned round with a half-impatient, half-amused smile. 'Quarrelled! no, indeed. I never trouble myself to quarrel with my own friends, why should I with yours? Is not having tired heartily of people reason enough for leaving them?'

"All this time, I believe, Lady Helen had forgotten that I was in the room. You can't think how uncomfortable I was. I did not know how to recall myself to their recollection, and yet I felt I ought not to remain while they spoke of such private matters. I don't know what I should have done if a servant, bringing Lady Helen's afternoon tea, had not just then entered. The start of surprise he gave when he saw Mr. Carr caused such a clatter among

the cups that Lady Helen had an excuse for scolding him, and I an opportunity of slipping away unheard by any one.

"It is now time to dress for dinner; I shall see Mr. Carr again when I go downstairs.


"Dearest, the evening is over, but I am further than ever from being able to tell you what I think of Mr. Carr. I cannot make up my mind about him, as I should about any other fresh acquaintance, because he is hardly like a new acquaintance to me. I have read his books till I feel as if I knew a great deal about him, while he knows nothing of me. It is a curious sort of feeling. I went downstairs rather dreading the dinner-hour. I expected that Lady Helen would be in very low spirits, and that she would hardly speak to her son. I was quite mistaken; she came down very nicely dressed, and smiling, and she talked pleasantly all the evening about some review she had been reading. Mr. Carr was rather silent at first, but by degrees he grew interested, began to defend the book which Lady Helen and the review condemned, and said a great many clever, playful things—not witty, exactly, but odd. It was very agreeable conversation to listen to. You and papa would have enjoyed it, but it was

company-talk, every word ; and now and then I felt pained to think that a mother and son could talk so on the first evening of their being together, drawing each other out, and applauding each other's witty speeches, like two strangers, or rivals, who were at the bottom a little afraid of each other. There has often been less restraint, and a nearer approach to proper home-talk, when Lady Helen and Charlie and I have been chatting together. I must tell you, too, that I was disappointed in Mr. Carr's manner of greeting Charlie. Lady Helen, Charlie, and I, were assembled in the drawing-room before Mr. Carr came down. Charlie had walked off his discontent, and was in a state of wild delight at the prospect of being in the same house for some weeks with his paragon. As soon as the door opened, he started up and came forward, holding out both hands, and looking so eager and handsome—you know Charlie's sweetest, brightest look !—I should have thought no one could have resisted such a welcome, but Mr. Carr seemed determined to see no special warmth in it. He looked at Charlie without seeing him, held out his hand carelessly, and made a stupid remark about the rain. Charlie looked as if a glass of cold water had been thrown into his face, and for a moment I hated Mr. Carr.

"Before the evening was over, however, I partly forgave him, for I thought I understood the cause of his coldness. Lady Helen was looking at him with her satirical eyes, and strange as it seems to say so, I believe he is afraid of showing the least bit of real feeling before her. His manner to Charlie quite changed when Lady Helen left the drawing-room for half an hour after tea. He came and sat by him, and talked to him about his college life, and his reading, in a cordial brotherly way, which will, I expect, attach Charlie to him more strongly than ever. I wish I could make you see this manner of his, Jenny. It is so different from Hilary's, or Mr. Armstrong's, or anybody's I ever saw before—so much more winning; it is almost humble, but it is the humility of a person who knows that he is very much thought of, and who is almost sorry to be cleverer than other people, for fear it should pain them. This winning way, however, Mr. Carr only has now and then. He has more changes of manner than any person I ever met. I wonder whether I shall like or dislike these changes when I have seen more of him.

"I will finish my letter by repeating what I can recollect of an argument between Lady Helen and Mr. Carr, which interested me, because I knew that

though they seemed to be talking in a general way, they were really thinking of particular people, and implying more in every sentence than their actual words conveyed. It began about the review: the book reviewed is a novel; Lady Helen and the reviewer find fault with it because they say the author has made everything in the book ugly. The scenery is commonplace, and even the heroine is plain. Mr. Carr, at first I fancy, from a love of contradiction, and then in earnest, defended the commonplace scenery and the plain heroine. Lady Helen said that he, being a poet, was bound to worship beauty; and he answered, quite hotly, that he should despise the poor sickly imagination that could not see beauty in every scene, and comeliness in every face, that still remained unspoiled as Nature and God had fashioned them. A poet should see more, not less than other people, he said, and be less bound by rules. As the argument went on, he seemed to say that he preferred plain people to handsome ones, and flat fields and delves to rivers and mountains. At last he broke out into a tirade against beauty and beautiful people. He said the possession of great beauty vulgarised the mind hardly less than the possession of great wealth; that an extremely beautiful



person must lose all generosity of character, through being obliged always to thrust her advantage in the face of others less favoured. He thought a beauty, decking herself out to eclipse other women, almost as insolent as a millionaire who was perpetually trying to convince his neighbours that he was richer than they. When he saw such a one, he said he felt insulted for all the plain women in the world; as if a gage had been flung down, which he was obliged to take up.

“Lady Helen remarked drily, that his opinions had altered very much since they had last talked together; and Charlie here luckily gave a ridiculous turn to the conversation by producing a frightful caricature he had just drawn of Mr. Carr’s latest lady-love. It made us all laugh, but when the laugh was over, Lady Helen still looked annoyed, and I am afraid she thought as I did, that mountain scenery and beautiful people, in the abstract, meant, in Mr. Carr’s mind, Morfa and Rosamond Lester; and that he was preparing her to find a change of opinion in him respecting both. Good night.”

The next letter contained hardly any allusion to Mr. Carr; it was full of details about a drive to

Deepdale and a dinner-party there ; of Lady Helen's delight at Charlie's successful mimicry of her country neighbours when they returned home, and of Nesta's secret disapprobation of their amusement. Squeezed into the last corner came the following P. S. :—

“ Charlie and I begin to think we shall hardly become better acquainted with Mr. Carr from living in the same house with him, than if he had remained at Morfa. Yesterday he brought me a book I had wished to see, but I don't believe he has addressed a dozen words to me since that first evening when we all talked so pleasantly together. He always looks *over* me, as if he had a vague idea that the space I occupied was filled by something, but he hardly cared to ascertain by what. Lady Helen and Charlie do not notice his silence ; they talk and laugh as much as usual, but it makes me doubly, trebly shy, to know there is a silent person in the company listening to the conversation. It infects the air of the room to my mind. I feel my cheeks getting red every time I have to speak. I wish I could help being so stupid.”

A week later came a very closely written epistle.

“ I finished a letter late last night,” it began,

“and it is only three o'clock in the day ; but I shall begin to write to you again, for something has happened that I must tell you. This shall be a journal letter : I will write in it an account of every day. To begin, why did I say that something had happened ? How you will laugh at me, Janet ! On second thought I find that nothing has happened. I have taken a walk to the shore and come back again, and I have talked to Mr. Carr, that is really all ; but in a country house one must make an event of every trifle. You know how one gets to the shore from Broadlands ; first, by walking through a wood, and then by crossing a flat, dreary-looking tract of marsh land which stretches from the Broadland woods to the sea. I am not fond of crossing the lonely marsh by myself, and to-day my courage was at a low ebb ; so I opened a book I had with me, and seated myself on a stump of an old tree close to the gate which leads from the wood, to rest, and read for half-an-hour ; or for the whole morning, if my cowardly fit lasted so long. I did not hear any one open the gate, or pass along the wood path ; but when after a time I looked up from my book, I saw Mr. Carr leaning against a tree, just opposite to where I was sitting. He was looking *at* me, not *over* me,

that time ; he had taken off his cap, and hung it on the gate-post, as if he had been settled there a long time ; and he had an open book in his hand. For a moment or two we looked at each other without speaking, and I did not feel it odd, because I have really grown so used to his behaving differently to any one else. At last he crossed the wood path, and stood straight before me, bending down a little.

“ ‘Miss Ernestine,’ he said (I had not supposed that he so much as knew my name), ‘I want you to change books with me, and read aloud a sentence from mine. The words are rather uncommon ones, but I think you can make them out if you try very hard.’

“I could not discover whether this was jest or earnest, Janet ; for though he was smiling, as if some odd thought were in his mind, his eyes were quite grave. I was altogether so puzzled, that I took the book and read aloud one or two uncouth sounding words he pointed out—not once, but several times, as he persisted in teaching me to say them rightly. At last the sound of our voices repeating these unmeaning words struck me as so ridiculous, that I began to laugh heartily. He laughed too, and then sitting

down on the grass by my side, he apologized for having interrupted my reading.

“‘But I could not help it,’ he said. ‘I assure you it was a wise precaution. I have been reading about you and your kin in this old book, as I walked through the wood, and when I saw you sitting there I felt afraid of coming near you, till I had made you pronounce the cabalistic words which render it safe for mortals to associate with wood-spirits. Hear what the old Comte de Gobalis says about you. He was considered a very potent sage in his day.’

“He then read aloud a sentence from the book I still held. It sounded great nonsense—about the only safe way of luring sylphs, hamadryads, and gnomes, from the elements, and making them content to live among mortals. The easiest spell was to induce the spirit (having surprised it in a lonely place) to repeat three times the potent word ‘Nehmahnuhah,’ and to combine with it in due form the delicious word ‘Eliael.’ If these were rightly spoken, the mischievous disposition of the eerie creature was expelled, and it became a safe companion; ‘but wood-spirits,’ the book said, ‘were usually extremely shy of committing themselves to such a rash proceeding.’ Mr. Carr pretended that he had half

expected to see me slip down into the tree-stump to avoid reading the potent words. When he had puzzled me by such talk for some time, he told me that the curious old book of necromancy from which he was reading had been a favourite study of his when he was a child, and that he had this morning turned it out from some forgotten hiding-place. 'Once,' he said, 'he believed every word, and spent hours puzzling over the directions it gives for working charms, always with a hope of finding, at last, one that he could practise.' He read one to me which had caused him many disappointments, because it sounded as if it might be worked so easily. I will copy it from the book for you, Janet.

"'To attract sylphs, gnomes, and nymphs, you have only to fill a glass vessel with compressed air, with earth, and with water, and leave it exposed to the sun's rays for a month. After that time effect a scientific separation of the elements, which you will easily accomplish. It is wonderful to see what a charm each of the elements thus purified possesses for attracting nymphs, sylphs, and gnomes. After taking the smallest particle of this preparation every day for a few months, you see in the air the flying commonwealth of the sylphs, the nymphs coming in

crowds from the water, and the guardians of hidden treasures displaying their stores of wealth.'

"Mr. Carr said that he used to swallow all kind of disagreeable mixtures, and come to the very spot on which we were sitting, and stand staring down the wood-path, half hoping to see the air and the water-people 'coming in crowds.' 'It used to be really a bitter disappointment,' he went on, 'when they never came; so you must not grudge me my recompense of having at last discovered one, in the old spot where I have so often summoned them in vain.'

"I told him that I did not approve of such heathenish rites, and that if there was any danger of air-people lurking in this wood, I would leave it for the open marsh, where, at all events, I could see all there was to be seen.

"Mr. Carr said he would walk down to the shore with me, and prove to me, as we went, that I could not see all there was to be seen, even in the open country; and do you know, Janet, all the time we were crossing the marsh, he kept pointing out to me beautiful things that I have passed many times without knowing they were there. The prettiest thing of all was a swan's nest hidden among the reeds of one of the shallow water-pools, of which

there are many in the marsh. I don't wonder now that Mr. Carr loves the country round Broadlands, he seems to know it so thoroughly; he sees something to admire in the shape of every one of the low sand-hills that bound the marsh. Each of the pools is a separate garden to him, and he is never tired of admiring the brown feathery-topped reeds, and the yellow water-flags and silvery willows that grow round them. He says no scenery pleases him quite so well as these flat wide marshes, which look monotonous to strangers, but which are, he thinks, full of change and life to those who know how to look at them. Just as he was telling me this, a heron rose up from among some reeds close to us, and flew across the marsh to the sea, its long legs trailing like streamers behind it. Mr. Carr's eyes followed it till it was lost behind the sand-hills, and then he looked down at me with a triumphant smile, as much as to say, 'There now, you are convinced: what can one want more than that?'

"When we reached the shore, he took me to a beautiful little cove among the sand-hills, which I should never have discovered for myself, where there is the richest store of shells. Mr. Carr could not tell me why there are more shells there than in other

spots on this coast, but he says he has always found it so. He used to call it his cove when he was a child, and he made a great favour of introducing me to it: he declares I am the first person he has ever taken there. Certainly, no industrious shell-gatherer can have visited it lately; I had only to sit down and collect the treasures the last high tide had left in heaps on the sand. Mr. Carr said they had been waiting there for me for three months, for it is only in autumn and spring that the highest tide reaches this cove.

“How wonderful it would have sounded to me if any one had told me, one windy day last March, that the waves were bringing up shells to the Broadlands beach *for me*, and that Mr. Carr would help me to gather them!

“We came in late for luncheon, and I fear Lady Helen was rather annoyed about it. She has been a little, just a little strange, in her manner to me this afternoon, and I rather dread the hours that will follow when I leave off writing, and go downstairs. I suppose Mr. Carr dislikes music, for Lady Helen has never asked me to play or sing since he came.

“To-day has been a company day; Sir John and Lady Moorsom, and their son and daughter, called early, and did not leave us till five o'clock. I thought

the time passed pleasantly, but I find that Lady Helen and Mr. Carr were very tired, and that they consider country visits a terrible infliction.

“Sir John is perhaps rather prosy, and Lady Moorsom talks a little too much about her charities in the village. I think I should not like to be a poor woman on her estate ; but the son and daughter appear sensible and kind-hearted. They left us for an hour to visit a poor fisherman's family, who had lately left their village, and settled at Broadlands.


“When they returned, just as we were sitting down to luncheon, some talk arose about the people in the fishing village near here. Lady Moorsom asked Lady Helen if she ever visited them, and Lady Helen answered with the sort of smile you can picture to yourself, Janet—that she really did not consider her manners good enough for such a task. She thought it must require *very* good manners to know how to enter a cottage uninvited, and find out what was being cooked for dinner, and how often the children's pinafores were washed. How did Lady Moorsom manage her visiting? She really should like to take a lesson.

“Lady Moorsom looked puzzled, and Mr. Moorsom answered for her, as I thought, very sensibly. It

was not good manners, he said, that were required. Where there was real sympathy and kind feeling the right manner would come, even to people far inferior to Lady Helen in everything but knowledge of their poor neighbours.

“ I admired Mr. Moorsom's courage in coming to his mother's help, because I believe it was a great effort to him ; all the time he was speaking he was twisting his dinner napkin into such a complicated knot, that he was employed the remainder of luncheon time in trying to untie it, and his face was crimson for the rest of the day. One good result has risen from the Moorsoms' visit: the agreement in opinion about them between Lady Helen and Mr. Carr has made them more at home with each other than they have lately appeared to be. We have had quite a chatty, sociable evening. I wish, however, that Charlie had not joined so heartily in laughing at Mr. and Miss Moorsom, for I am sure they are good people, and they cannot help being plain.

“ I ventured to put Mr. Carr in mind of what he had said the other evening, and asked him how it was he did not feel inclined to take up the gauntlet in defence of Miss Moorsom's plainness. He excused himself by explaining that it was only unobtrusive



ugliness that he felt called upon to defend. Self-satisfied ugliness was as offensive as self-satisfied beauty. We afterwards drew from him a description of what he considered unobtrusive ugliness, and when he had given it, Charlie protested that he had been describing me. Lady Helen thought, I believe, that I should be hurt, for she turned the conversation quickly, and looked for a moment rather annoyed.

“ *Thursday*.—An old friend of Lady Helen's, a Mr. Vyse, has come to spend three days here: he seems to have known Lady Helen all her life, and to be very intimate with her. I am afraid I shall not like him; though I can see that he is very clever, and what most people call agreeable. He and Lady Helen talked a great deal during dinner, and I noticed that Mr. Vyse never spoke of any person or thing without leaving a disagreeable impression on one's mind that there was something wrong about it. Whether he professed to be praising or blaming, it was all the same. Mr. Carr did not take much part in the conversation, but every now and then he questioned some statement of Mr. Vyse's, and then a little sharp word-fight followed. They never carried on the discussion long, or let it become quite earnest; it ended on both sides with a sort of shrug, as if each

despaired of the other too much to care to convince him.

“After tea I went into the garden, for I was really tired of listening to conversation I did not quite understand. Before I had been there long, Mr. Carr joined me, and we walked up and down the lawn in the moonlight for about half-an-hour. I have so often felt disappointed in things Mr. Carr has said, so often felt a want, that it was pleasant (for Charlie's sake) to find how much nearer to me he is than Mr. Vyse. He seems to dislike his mocking, indifferent tone of mind quite as much as I do. I wish Charlie did the same. I do not like the part he often takes in conversation here. He says things which I know he does not quite mean, just for the sake of agreeing with Lady Helen, and makes assertions, and laughs at jokes, of which I believe he does not see the true bearing.

“To-night I think I was able to make Mr. Carr see how much harm such careless talk was doing to Charlie—how it was changing him; and he promised to be careful how he used the influence he has over him. It was a pleasant half-hour in the garden, yet I regret that I went out to-night. Lady Helen thought it so very imprudent of me to stay so long in the evening air, and said in a meaning way that gave me

pain, that she would never have taken charge of me, if she had not thought me a more prudent young lady than I had proved myself to be. If there were not so many beautiful things here, and if I did not feel somehow as if this knowledge of the country were giving me a new life, I should wish myself at home again.

"*Saturday*.—I have felt in disgrace with Lady Helen all to-day, and I don't know how I should have borne it if a diversion in my favour had not been made by Mr. and Miss Moorsom, who called in the afternoon, and were asked by Lady Helen to stay for dinner. I talked a great deal to them all the afternoon and evening, and found it really a relief to chat unconstrainedly, on common-place topics, with plain people, who are not always expecting one to say witty things.


"Mr. Moorsom is a great gardener, and has the finest conservatory in the neighbourhood. He has some rare plants in flower now, and Miss Moorsom proposed that I should spend a day at Deepdale, and be introduced to the conservatories and the village school. I heard her talking to Lady Helen about it, and I saw that Lady Helen looked propitious. How sociable and friendly country neighbours are!

I wonder Lady Helen does not like them. Miss Moorsom shook hands with me to-night as warmly as if I had known her for a year. Mr. Moorsom is certainly very awkward. When his turn came to shake hands, he hesitated quite a minute, and then, just as I was going to bow, he put out his large bony hand and gave mine such a clasp, that it quite hurt my fingers. I wish I could make you see him, Janet. He is very tall and broad-shouldered. His face, which would naturally be fair, is burned red with sun and roughened with wind, like a labourer's. He sits down and moves with an effort. Indeed, movement of any kind seems so difficult to him, that when he has once fixed his prominent, very blue eyes on one's face, one feels quite in despair of his ever turning them away again. I don't think he is conscious that he is staring. It must be a habit he has.

"*Sunday.*—Jenny, I have been very happy and very unhappy to-day—happier and more unhappy than I have ever been before in my life; yet now, at the end of the day, I cannot understand either my sorrow or my great joy. It was a bright morning, and when I threw up my window after I was dressed, there was a stillness in the air that made me feel it was Sunday. Every day for the last

fortnight there has been a little wind—enough to keep the leaves of the trees in constant motion, and fill the air with sound. I liked the sound; but to-day (being Sunday) the stillness pleased me better. It was not perfect stillness. Through it I could catch faint, faint sounds—the stirring of wings, and the buzzing of insects, and, softened by distance, the regular ripple of the waves rising on the shore. The whole world seemed still, but not asleep—only resting. I thought I was going to be happy all day, but before breakfast was over I had a great disappointment. I found that nobody was even thinking of going to church. Lady Helen said it was much too hot for her to attempt to leave the house; Mr. Vyse said he should walk to the top of the hill to try to get a breath of air; and Mr. Carr, to my great dismay, asked Charlie to take a walk with him on the shore. I felt that I ought to have said, ‘Charlie, it is Sunday; won’t you go with me to church first?’ but oh, Janet! I was a coward, and I could not say it. I thought Lady Helen was looking at me, and that she might fancy I wished to dictate to other people besides Charlie. The church-bell began sounding at the moment, and for fear of being late myself, I ran off to get ready.

The road to church lies through the same wood that leads to the sea. I should have enjoyed the walk on that still, bright morning, if I had not felt so angry with myself, a little with Charlie, and a great deal with Mr. Carr. I thought it so unkind of him to make it difficult for Charlie to act according to his conscience, instead of helping him, as he might have done, by one word; when I had explained it all to him too—when I had gone out of my way to ask a favour of him! Yes, I do think it was *very* unkind. I could not blame Charlie much for wasting his Sunday morning. I know how difficult it is to him to refuse Mr. Carr anything. I felt that the person really to blame was the one who had used his influence wrongly. That thought brought a great many other uncomfortable ones into my mind. I began to ask myself if one ought to shut one's heart quite against people who cannot be trusted to use their influence rightly. Ought one to keep out of their way and trample out every spark of liking? Or suppose (as is the case between Charlie and Mr. Carr) that the liking had gone on for years—silently, unconsciously, so that the first time it is looked at, it is too deeply rooted to be torn up: would it be presumptuous then, to go on liking and hope to be



able to withstand the influence whenever it seemed to lean the wrong way?

“I was battling these thoughts out in my mind all through the first part of the prayers. I am ashamed to say that I hardly heard a word till the second lesson was read. In it, as you will remember, Jenny, there is that verse where our Lord says, that ‘those who deny Him before men, He will deny before the angels of heaven.’ I have often heard it read before, but it always seemed to me as if I had nothing to do with it—as if it concerned the martyr-times only; and once I used to wish that I had lived in times when it was possible to confess Christ before men. To-day the words struck upon my heart like a blow, for, Jenny, this very week I have heard Charlie assent to words which sounded almost like denying Christ, and I have not dared to blame him much; for I have felt in my heart that I too could be drawn on, by fear of Lady Helen’s satire, or dread of seeming dictatorial or unfeminine, not perhaps to deny, but to hide my confession so deep in my heart, that it could do no good to any one. It was then I felt more unhappy than I had ever felt in my life before. I said to myself that I wished we had never come here, and that if I could, without

troubling mamma, I would write and ask papa to let us come home again; but, Janet, I felt glad in my heart to know that mamma would be so really sorry if I did, that I must not think of such a thing. Yes, and I am very glad now to be obliged to stay, for since that unhappy hour I have been very happy, and all my scruples and doubts have gone to sleep again. I am afraid I shall not be able to make you see the happy part of the day. I do not understand why I liked it so much myself. It was after afternoon church. You don't know yet, Janet, what a lovely time a summer afternoon is in the country—the great heat of the day has passed, the shadows of the trees are growing longer and deeper, and the sunshine is more golden.

“ When I came out of church and saw everything looking so beautiful, I was in no haste to return to the house. I thought I would cross the marsh and go round by the shore, feeling sure I should have the beach-walk to myself since Charlie and Mr. Carr had been there all the morning; but, Janet, I was mistaken—I did not have the beach to myself. As I passed the little cove where the shells are, Mr. Carr came out from it (he had been sitting there all the afternoon reading), and we walked home together.

At first we talked about the pretty sights on the shore, the sea-urchins walking with their hundred legs in the shallow pools left by the tide, the gulls floating up and down on the waves, the cormorants sailing heavily from one sand-hill to another. Then by degrees—I don't know how it was, he did not ask me any questions—but somehow, without my being able to help it, I found myself telling him the history of the day; and how I could not feel quite at home with all the beautiful sights he was pointing out, because I was disappointed and angry, with myself, and Charlie, and him. I did not say 'and him,' he said it for me—but he did not seem offended, only very grave and very kind. He asked me one or two questions in a quick surprised way of his, that almost takes away my breath—why I cared so much about Charlie's wasting that one Sunday morning? and what were the words that I had blamed myself so much for not having courage to dissent from? We walked quickly, while he talked quickly; suddenly, he stood still, exclaiming that he was tiring me, and made me sit down to rest on the dry white sand. He sat near me, but for a long time he did not speak a word—he sat letting the sand drip through his fingers and looking out towards the sea: I, too,

looked over the sea. It was very pretty just then ; the sun was sinking, and the sea looked as if it were crossed by a bridge of gold sloping from heaven to the shore, down which angels might have walked on Sunday evening. That was the time when I felt so happy. I don't exactly know why—I suppose because not having you, it was a comfort to find some one who would listen to my troubles without laughing at them. At last Mr. Carr jumped up, and said we must not forget that we had still a long walk before us. He would not apologize, he said, for being silent so long ; I had given him so much to think of, he did not know when the thoughts I had called up would end ; he hoped never. As he said this, he held out his hand. I gave him mine, because I thought he meant it for a compact between us, that he would never again say anything that could do harm to Charlie. I am sure he will never break the promise of that hand-clasp—do you think he will, Janet ? I think it was better, more binding than words.

“ Write quickly to me, Janet, and tell me what you think of all that I have said to you. Tell me if you are satisfied with me, and if you can explain my contradictory feeling—so glad and so sorry about such little things.”

CHAPTER XIV.

“ I would not choose
To lack a relish for the things that God
Thinks worth. Among my own I will be good ; I
A helper to all those that look to me.”

GEORGE MACDONALD.

MEANWHILE the weeks passed on with me in a somewhat monotonous manner. I spent my mornings, and frequently the greater part of the afternoon, at Mrs. Wilton's house. In the evening I read aloud to my father, or helped him to look over the themes and exercises which always accumulated fast during the last weeks of term-time. Mr. Armstrong was our constant evening visitor, and frequently helped me with my work. I don't know how my father and I should have got through those busy days without his help. I should have been very happy if I had not had some anxious thoughts about Nesta, and been disturbed by some doubts as to whether it

would be right to persuade my father to go to Scotland, since his absence from home would oblige Nesta to prolong her visit to Broadlands for another six weeks.

The very evening before the happy breaking-up day, I received a letter from Broadlands which greatly increased my perplexity. It came by the late post, while Mr. Armstrong was spending the evening with us, and he good-naturedly offered to finish a pile of exercises, on which I was engaged, that I might have leisure to read my letter at once. I gladly resigned my seat at the writing-desk to him, and retired to my favourite place behind a window-curtain, where I had sufficient light to read my letter comfortably. It proved to be from Lady Helen, and was marked "Private."

"DEAR JANET,—Being much in want of a little rational conversation this morning, my thoughts have turned to you, with a conviction that my desire would have a better chance of being gratified if I had two Miss Scotts staying in this dull country-house with me instead of one. Now, I know you too well to suppose that you will be pleased with a compliment which implies a disparagement of your

sister, and I assure you I do not intend any reflection on sweet Ernestine's conversational powers; but then, you see, there are times when the pleasantest talker will grow silent. I am in a very tantalizing position just now: I have the pleasantest companions in the world near me, and none of them disposed to bestow upon me one word. Of course I was prepared to endure a great amount of wearisomeness and stupidity from Shafto, and when he inflicted himself on me during his temporary banishment from Morfa, I gave him anything but a cordial welcome. I should have preferred his taking the unreasonableness and ill-humour incident to his condition, anywhere in the world but to my house; however, I was prepared for this. One distracted lover I might have laughed at, but when one's house comes to be haunted by a second, I find myself past laughing, quite ready to scold. Are not you longing to have a key to my enigma? Do I not see the puzzled look on your face, and your eyes glancing up and down the paper.

"To speak more explicitly, then, Ernestine has made a conquest, and one which many more distinguished damsels would have plumed themselves upon. She has probably mentioned my neighbours, the Moorsoms, in her letters to you; but whether she has

said more or less about them, I am certain that much of what I have to tell will be news to you. They are connexions of mine, whom I have known, more or less intimately, all my life—thoroughly worthy people, but more to your father's and mother's taste than to mine. The son, who hopes to find himself to Miss Ernestine's taste, is by far the most presentable of the party. Being heir to a very fine estate, all the young ladies in the county, in succession, have tried to catch him in vain; he was supposed to be invulnerable—a sort of wild Orson of the woods, or rather, as we have no woods in Norfolk, of the turnip-fields. The most determined match-makers despaired of him, and I certainly never should have expected that his subjugation was reserved for our quiet Nesta. There was no show of resistance either; he capitulated at once. Before he had been a day in her company, it was evident to all observers that his fate was sealed. Father, mother, and sister, who have hitherto professed themselves ambitious on his account, have now taken the wise course of submitting themselves to the inevitable. The hero himself displays a devotion worthy of other times. If it were not such a commonplace phrase, I should say he worships the ground she treads upon.

“He is a shy, awkward fellow, and used to be my *beau-ideal* of ungainliness ; but I assure you I have seen his plain freckled face look positively beautiful, from the happiness that shines in it, when fate favours him so far as to give him occasion to perform some trifling service for her. He is thankful from the bottom of his heart when he has an opportunity of picking up her handkerchief or handing her a chair ; but when she condescends to employ his long arm to gather a rose from my trellis, his delight renders him so reckless in his exertions, that, if the courtship lasts much longer, I shall have neither trellis work nor roses left in my garden. I cannot speak with the same certainty of the fair damsel's feelings ; I have never said a word to her : indeed, she is so charming in her unconsciousness, that it would be wicked to disturb her.

“I do not say a word, but I do not shut my eyes, and I see that she is a different creature from what she was a month ago. It may be all country air, but I never knew country air embellish any one so wonderfully. She has more pretty ways than ever : she can now and then say saucy things, and she dance up and down stairs, and sings little snatches of songs, when she fancies herself alone. There are, however,



I suspect, showers as well as sunshine in her atmosphere—light summer showers, after which her sweet little flower face holds itself up bright and tremulous, like a rain-washed rose.

“It is a very pretty little romance on both sides, and I enjoy watching its progress; yet, on the whole, I should prefer that either you or your mother were here to conduct it to its proper termination. I have known girls quite as tender-hearted and gentle as Ernestine throw away the most devoted love, and the best chance of happiness ever offered to them, simply because it came before they were prepared to face the realities of life. I fear lest Ernestine may misunderstand her own feelings when the moment for decision arrives. It will come upon her with a sort of shock, and she will, perhaps, recoil from the thought of settling her life so early. Some one in whom she has been used to confide, and who will guide her to a reasonable course of conduct, ought to be near her. If the last accounts from Morfa had not alarmed me, I should have written to your mother; as it is, I think it best to spare her additional anxiety, and so open my heart in preference to you.

“If I had had the slightest doubt about Mr. Moor-
som's being thoroughly acceptable to your father and

mother, I should not have allowed him to see as much of Nesta as he has done ; but he is in every way so exactly what they would choose for a son-in-law, that, if all goes right, I shall expect a little gratitude.

“ How pretty it will be too see Ernestine reigning at Deepdale Grange ; how she will *fête* you all when you come to stay with her there. I consider that your sister's happiness is at stake, so do not fail me, dear wise Janet. With your sisterly advice, she cannot fail to accept the safe, bright lot that is so unexpectedly offered to her. Come early in next week.

“ Your affectionate friend,

“ HELEN CARR.”

Here was a puzzle for me ! I could not bear the idea of reading this letter to my father, for I knew that if he heard it, all hope of persuading him to take the journey to Edinburgh would be at an end, my beloved scheme would have to be given up, and my two months' labour rendered fruitless. I was sure my father would be so much disturbed at the bare thought of Nesta's being stolen away from us, that he would order her to return immediately, and stay

at home himself, and keep safe guard over her. Yet, on the other hand, my conscience would not allow me to keep back the letter, and take no notice of Lady Helen's request. If I could go to Nesta I fancied (in my self-confidence) that all would be well, but I must either join Nesta at Broadlands or suffer my father to summon her home.

While I was pondering sorrowfully over this difficulty, Mr. Armstrong finished the exercises and came to join me in the window, my father having meanwhile fallen into his evening doze.

I am not a reserved person, and Mr. Armstrong always had what I used to consider in those days a tiresome habit of finding out when anything had happened to trouble me. I don't know whether my unreserve or his curiosity was most in fault that evening, but certainly before we had been conversing many minutes I found myself confiding to him the hopes I had entertained of being able to persuade my father to visit Dr. Allison during the coming holidays, and my vexation at the obstacle to his and my journey, which had risen so suddenly.

Of course I did not say anything about my engagement with Mrs. Wilton, neither did I give any reason for my anxiety to join Nesta. I was discreet enough

to be silent on those points. When one is perplexed how to act, it is often a comfort to hear a decided opinion. Mr. Armstrong did not scruple to give me one.

"Your father must go to Scotland," he said; "you must not let anything stand in the way. It is most important that he should see Dr. Allison."

"Yet I shall be sorry if Nesta is obliged to remain alone at Broadlands six weeks longer."

"Could not your mother return to London?"

"I fear not, Hilary is so resolved that she shall stay till Rosamond is well. I know Mr. Lester has written to entreat Lady Helen to keep Nesta and Charlie a month longer at Broadlands. I suspect it is only fear of disobliging him that induces Lady Helen to ask Nesta to prolong her visit."

"Will it content your sister if you join her, since she cannot come to you?"

"How can I? Papa cannot travel to Edinburgh alone."

"But he can travel with me. I am going to Scotland in a fortnight. We might arrange to make the journey together."

"You? But you are not going to Scotland," I cried. "I heard you say only an hour ago that you

had arranged to take a walking tour among the Tyrolean Alps.

"Within the last hour I have arranged to have a walking tour in the Scotch Highlands. Do you see any objection?"

"Yes, I do. I don't see why you should alter all your plans for our convenience."


"Nor do I; but we are speaking of modifying one. I intend to take a tour somewhere; it is nearly indifferent to me where I go; and if with the pleasure of a tour I can combine the pleasure of serving my friends, why should not I? It is quite simple."

When people will render great services in such off-hand, indifferent fashion, there is no use attempting to thank them. My gratitude was reduced to silence, and Mr. Armstrong began immediately to discuss the details of the journey.

"How soon shall you know your father's decision?"

"To-morrow night, I hope."

"Well, when you are enumerating the advantages of your plan, do not forget to point out the convenience of having me for a travelling companion. Your father's time shall be mine. I will look in late to-morrow evening to hear what you have done."



The next day was one of those bright days which cannot come often in a life, and which should therefore be made the most of while they are passing, and when memory recalls them in after years.

In the morning I gave my last lesson at Mrs. Wilton's, and took leave of my pupil, with whose progress both father and mother declared themselves to be perfectly satisfied. In the afternoon I occupied myself with writing letters to Nesta and Lady Helen, in which I ventured to hold out hopes of my speedy arrival at Broadlands. During tea-time I drew my father into conversation about his Scotch relations, and by dint of dwelling upon the cordial welcome he would have received from them, and the pleasure he would have enjoyed in their society, I succeeded in making him grumble at the unfortunate circumstances which obliged him to give up all hope of visiting them this year. Then when the tea-things were cleared away, and he was resting in the twilight in his arm-chair, I took my usual seat at his feet, and with some little trepidation, told him what I had done; and ventured to slip the notes which I had that morning received from Mrs. Wilton into his hand. I was, happily, quite prepared for the reception my story had; there was all possible kind-

ness and tenderness in my father's manner of receiving my offering, but there was sadness, too. It pained him a little, just at first, that he should need one of his children to work for him instead of being able to supply all their wants and his own. It was but a momentary feeling, however, and when it had passed, his gratitude for what I had done for him was far greater than my easy service deserved.

During the long talk that followed between us that evening, he revealed to me more of his own dread of the calamity that was possibly coming upon him than he had ever yet permitted any one to know. I began then first to understand what a struggle for submission to the will of God he was living through; how he dreaded, and yet strove to prepare himself for the moment when all hope of escape would fail, and he should have to face the necessity of resigning himself to a life of darkness and inactivity. Every month's experience which forced him to resign one accustomed duty after another, convinced him, he said, that the dreaded time was drawing near. I could not persuade him to hope such great things as I did from Dr. Allison's skill, but I saw he was thankful for the rest of knowing, that no possible change of averting the threatened evil had been


cast away. Most thankful of all to have the wound in his heart healed which Charlie's indifference had caused ; to be spared the temptation of ever thinking or saying in future dark hours, that he might have been saved if his children had loved him enough to divine in time the care he needed. The privilege accorded to me, then, of being allowed to bear a portion of my father's burden, was never withdrawn from me afterwards. I have always looked upon it as one of the most precious gifts of my life.

CHAPTER XV.

“ I wept for memory,
She sang for hope that is so fair.”

WITH so energetic a person as Mr. Armstrong to share our counsels, there was no fear that we should be long in making arrangements for our respective journeys. He allowed me three days to prepare. On the fourth we all started together, as our road lay in the same direction till we reached the station, ten miles from Broadlands, where I was to leave the train.

On the evening before we left home, my conscience troubled me for not having made my father acquainted with the contents of Lady Helen's last letter. I compromised the matter with myself by throwing out a few hints in the course of a farewell conversation we had, which he might take or not as he pleased. He was extremely slow in taking them,



but when at length my meaning dawned upon him, he treated the whole matter so lightly, that I felt entirely excused from taking him further into my confidence.

"Some one in love with Nesta? What a ridiculous idea!" my father cried, rather angrily. "Why, she is a mere child! I have not had time to begin her education yet! She must not fancy that she is grown up. What does she say herself, the foolish child?"

"Dear papa, you must not be angry with Nesta. *She* does not say anything about it."

"Then pray take care that no one else does. I shall trust you, Janet. You have some sense. And, remember, I cannot have my little Nesta spoiled. Yes, it is as well you are going to Broadlands. I shall trust to you."

So the subject was dismissed for the time; but I fancy my father had some slight misgiving after his first angry incredulity had passed away.

In talking over the length of his absence with Mr. Armstrong and me, while we were together in the railway-carriage the next day, he seemed anxious to convince himself that it need not be so great as we had at first intended. The proposed six weeks

dwindled into three, and at last, when our parting drew near, he said, "Now, remember I trust you, Janet. A fortnight will decide my case. At the end of that time there is no reason why we should not all settle quietly at home again, just as we were. Remember, Janet, don't let me hear of any changes."

I had no time to make a promise which I certainly should not have been able to keep. The train stopped, and the next moment Charlie's and Nesta's faces appeared suddenly at the carriage-window.

They had driven over from Broadlands to the station to meet me, and to get a peep at my father on his way to Scotland. It was but a moment's greeting. Mr. Armstrong hurried me from the carriage, and made energetic efforts to secure my luggage. Then came the shrill whistle. He had to jump in again, and in a moment more they were whirled away, their farewells still sounding in my ears—my father's serious "God bless you, my best child!" and Mr. Armstrong's cheerful "Don't be anxious. I'll take care of him, Miss Janet."


We found Lady Helen waiting for us in her carriage outside the station. I think she was really pleased and relieved to see me; for if she had not been in a very good humour, she would hardly have

listened so patiently to the home-chatter which Nesta, Charlie, and I kept up incessantly during the long drive home. She even condescended to laugh at our nonsense, and say that it was pleasant to see how we enjoyed being together again.

I learned, during the conversation, that Mr. and Miss Moorsom were coming that day to remain at Broadlands till the end of the week.

When we reached the house Nesta was eager to take me into the garden and introduce me at once to some of her favourite haunts; but Lady Helen interposed her authority, insisting that Nesta should go to her room and rest till dinner-time. She could not allow Nesta to tire herself and make herself look pale and wretched *that evening*, she said. She wished her to be her best and brightest, and do herself justice before the guests who were coming to see her. Lady Helen stroked Nesta's cheek and looked admiringly into her face as she said this; but Nesta's countenance fell, and I thought she looked more disturbed than the little disappointment about the garden warranted.

The pleasure of taking me to her room and showing me its odd furniture, restored her to good humour and happy spirits again. But I fancied (it might be



only fancy) that Nesta was not quite as unreserved with me, when we were alone together, as it had been her habit to be. She chatted gaily, indeed, but it was to ask eager questions about my own doings, or to point out pretty views of the marshes and the woods, which I might gain from the windows. I could not help feeling all the time that our conversation was not the full confidence on the subjects that interested us most nearly that it used to be. It was almost a relief when the dressing-bell rang, and I had to resign myself into Nesta's hands to be dressed for the evening. As we were leaving our room to go down stairs, a maid came with a message from Lady Helen, to beg me to go to her before dinner.

When I reached Lady Helen's room I found her standing before the glass, putting some finishing touches to a not very careful toilet.

"Ah! my dear, I am glad to see you dressed. I intended to have had a long talk with you, but I positively fell asleep on my sofa, and now we have not a minute. Justine, I must have a cap; my hair is quite rough still—and that lace shawl. There, that will do; go now and see if you can do anything for Miss Ernestine."

When the maid had left the room, Lady Helen turned from the glass to me :

"My dear, I ought to have had some conversation with you before dinner. I am so annoyed with myself for sleeping. What has little Nesta been talking to you about?"

"I have been talking to her about home, and she has described the walks and the scenery here."

"Now, Janet, don't let us misunderstand each other. I see you are drawing yourself up to withstand what you consider an intrusion into your and Nesta's confidence; but be reasonable. If I do want to know what is passing just now in her mind, can I have any motive but good will to her, and anxiety that she should secure her own happiness?"

"I think not," I answered ponderingly.

"You naughty girl; you ought to be sure. However, I will not task your faith in me too severely. You shall judge me by my actions. I will not ask another question; I will only give you a caution. Do not form a hasty judgment of the friends you will meet here to-day, or at least don't express it. A foolish word of ridicule, a disparaging remark, may just upset the balance of judgment in your sister's

mind, and lose her such a chance of happiness as she may never have again. Be wise."

"I will be true," I answered gravely. "I don't believe that Nesta's happiness does depend on a chance word of mine, or can be furthered by any arrangements between us two. Surely there must be some reality in liking; something that cannot be upset by hasty words. I will not talk Nesta into liking or disliking any one. I can only promise to say what I think."

Lady Helen shrugged her shoulders: "Poor Nesta! Well, I have done; I have no longer any responsibility. I have been used to think that experience gives people some right to advise in circumstances where a little misunderstanding might produce a life-long regret. It seems you prefer to act alone, without my guidance. I may now shut my eyes and give myself no further trouble."

"But, Lady Helen, I am not going to act or guide; I am not going to do anything."

"Yes you are; you will act and guide without knowing what you are doing, that is all. Perhaps you are right; some people are not strong enough to influence in any other way. They shut their eyes to their own responsibility, and let themselves be

drifted on, till they are sometimes surprised at the aspect of their own doings. I hope that you may be fortunate, and never have to regret yours. Now we must go down stairs, and I will introduce you to my son and my guests. If we do not give poor Mr. Moorsom five minutes to recover the shock of speaking to a fresh person, he won't be able to eat any dinner."

It was a very incomprehensible idea to me that I could be formidable enough to shock any one, however shy; but when Lady Helen had led me across the drawing-room, and I raised my eyes to look at the stranger to whom she presented me, I did not consider the expression too strong. Mr. Moorsom looked very much like a person who had unexpectedly received a shock from an electric battery, and who was trying hard to bear it without shrinking. His arms and legs were rigid, his face glowed like a peony, and his hands were convulsively crushed together; he opened his mouth three several times to speak, panted, and shut it again.

"Let us all sit down," Lady Helen said compassionately, after the third failure. "Ah! here are your sister and Ernestine coming to join us; they have been walking round the garden. Janet, I shall

leave Nesta to make you acquainted with her friend ; it will be such a pleasure to her."

Lady Helen glided away, and Miss Moorsom came towards me through the open window, holding out her hand, without waiting till Nesta spoke my name. "Oh! I don't stand on stupid ceremonies of that kind," she said. "I know who you are, and you know who I am: that's enough."

She was tall and angular, like her brother. I should have considered her manner disagreeably abrupt, if I had not felt sure that her excited way of speaking and constant nervous laugh were symptoms of the same painful shyness that overpowered her brother.

"You are not at all like your sister," she presently remarked, in a voice that sounded through the room. "Miss Scott is not the least like her sister, is she, Richard? should you have guessed that they were sisters?"

Richard's fingers suffered severely from the appeal; he crushed them till the joints seemed ready to give way; then, not finding that exercise sufficiently painful, he caught convulsively at his left knee, and, passing the clasped hands round it, elevated it to a position that almost concealed his face, and

put mine in peril of being touched by the sole of his boot.

I was divided between a strong inclination to laugh, and a feeling of annoyance, which increased while Miss Moorsom persisted in comparing my personal appearance with Nesta's, remarking on the points of contrast with a plainness of speech rather trying to my self-love.

It was a relief to us all when at last Mr. Carr entered, and Lady Helen called upon him immediately to take me into the dining-room.

I had heard so much of Mr. Carr, that I could not help scanning his face curiously when I found myself seated next him at dinner. I had long ago, so long ago as the day when Charlie came back from school and first talked to us about him, made up my mind to dislike Mr. Carr if I ever saw him. For the first half-hour of our acquaintance I had the satisfaction of finding my prejudice justified. He was decidedly very much out of humour that day, and did not take any pains to conceal the fact. He snubbed Miss Moorsom when she persisted in asking him questions, and found fault captiously with almost every remark Mr. Moorsom ventured on making. I decided quite to my own satisfaction that Nesta could not possibly

like so disagreeable a person, and that I had been frightening myself with shadows. Before dinner was over, however, he recovered himself so far as to take some pains to draw me into conversation. He spoke of Morfa and Hilary, and against my will I grew interested in listening. More than any one I ever knew, Mr. Carr had the art of making those with whom he took the trouble to converse feel at once at home with him. He seemed to have a mysterious power of divining the subject on which his companion for the moment preferred to talk, and he always managed to convey the impression that this particular subject was a meeting-point which the speaker and himself shared between them. He could talk to people, too, about themselves without seeming impertinent, and speak of his own character without being egotistical. In discussing Hilary's character with me that day, I remember he compared it with his own, with just enough disparagement of himself to make the comparison flattering to my love for Hilary, and with enough self-preference to prevent the disparagement appearing untruthful.

"I am happier than your brother in one thing, and in one only," he remarked. "Opposite as we are, completely opposite, I can do full justice to

him. He can never do justice to me, or to any one like me."

"Why not? I am sure Hilary is just to every one," I objected.

He shook his head and laughed; then growing grave immediately, he explained. "Just—yes, he would be just. I suppose it is just to judge without ill-will, according to your own standard—but, do not attempt to deny it—I have measured the height and breadth and depth of your brother's contempt for me. He can never rightly see me through it, I assure you. Luckily, it is no barrier to my understanding and admiring him."

"Are you sure there is no mingling of contempt in your appreciation?" I said.

"Certainly not. I value myself on not knowing such a feeling as contempt. I dare say I lose a great deal by not being able to condemn anything heartily—a great deal of power and thoroughness; but it is the character of my mind, and such a character has certainly some gains. I hold to the gains."

"But do you mean to say that you don't prefer some people to others—that you don't think some people better than others?"

"Not at all. I only mean that I have the candour not to elevate my own likings and dislikings into a standard of right and wrong. I dislike several people enough to wish to keep out of their way. Having established a safe distance between myself and them, I have no desire that they should be other than they are. I can look at them approvingly, and perhaps enjoy their disapproval."

"But stay," I cried; "you can't mean what you are saying. You must disapprove bad people, and wish them to be different from what they are. One must not puzzle one's self about right and wrong, for you know that is not a question of private likings and dislikings; there is a standard out of ourselves."

"Ah! now you are trying to draw me into deep waters; and there is my mother putting up her eyeglass to watch us. There is nothing she enjoys so much as seeing two people engage in a theological discussion, as ours will become, if I follow where your question leads. It gives her the same malicious pleasure that some people take in seeing two old women run a race in sacks; she suspects that we shall not get far without stumbling and falling out with

each other. We will disappoint her and remain friends. May I venture on making a personal remark? Till this moment I have been thinking how much you resemble your father, but your manner of insinuating 'you know' into your argument shows me that it is your mother whom you are most like. She was always trying to come round me in the same way."

I had never been told before that I resembled my beautiful mother in the slightest degree. I knew it was not true, yet I could not help being pleased with the remark, and induced to modify my harsh opinion of a person who could say such agreeable things. My appreciation of Mr. Carr's powers of conversation was, perhaps, heightened by contrast, for when we returned to the drawing-room, Lady Helen took up a book, and Nesta and I had to devote ourselves to Miss Moorsom, who seemed to find it as difficult to be silent as other shy people do to speak. Her brother was her chief topic. There was evidently no such hero in the world to her as he; neither could she be satisfied with praising him herself; she required full meed of approbation from us, and could not be turned from any one of her narratives till she had

had a clear expression of our admiration of his conduct. By the time Mr. Moorsom himself appeared, I had exhausted every form of acquiescence I could think of, and I hailed his joining our party with a feeling of relief: his sister could not surely expect us to flatter him to his face.

He had hardly seated himself beside Nesta, however, before Miss Moorsom was seized with a sudden desire to take a walk with me in the garden. I tried to avoid compliance at first, but when she urged her request a second time, Lady Helen raised her eyes from her book, and gave me a glance which obliged me to submit to my fate, and leave Nesta to hers. It was a lovely evening, and if I had not thought that Nesta looked a little reproachfully at me, as I passed, through the window, I should have enjoyed my stroll up and down the smooth lawn, even with Miss Moorsom's incessant chatter as an accompaniment to the rustle of leaves and the distant sound of the tide rising on the shore. Praise of Nesta now alternated with praise of her brother in Miss Moorsom's discourse. No one could admire Nesta too much to please me, and yet every now and then the words of commendation jarred. It was as if Miss Moorsom were praising

something of her own instead of something of mine, and also as if considerable credit were due to her for discovering virtues and graces which she seemed to presume had never hitherto been appreciated rightly. Nesta might be, as Miss Moorsom called her, "a gem of purest ray serene;" but there was no occasion to insinuate that she would have been hid in "unfathomed caves of ocean," if the Moorsoms had not bestowed upon her the setting of their approbation.


When we re-entered the drawing-room, we found its occupants disposed in different groups from those we had left. Nesta had escaped to the sofa, and was helping Charlie to make out some pencilled notes scribbled on the margins of a volume of Browning's poems; while Lady Helen, having given up her book and reading chair to her son, occupied Nesta's old seat by the window, and was engaged in confidential talk with Mr. Moorsom. As we entered, Miss Moorsom's sleeve caught in the trellis, and as I stood still to disengage it, I could not help overhearing a sentence of Lady Helen's discourse.

"Such pretty love!" I heard her say. "One

must see her with her sister to appreciate what she is. Ah! it is a heart worth winning. This sister is your great rival. She reigns so supreme, that there is hardly room for any one else. I never saw anything so pretty, as her reverence for her sister's supposed wisdom, combined with an almost motherly care of her. Dressing her up at one moment like a doll, and the next listening to her as if she were an oracle. You did not give me credit for so much observation, or for admiring excellence so heartily—now confess you did not?"

To my great relief, Miss Moorsom moved on before her brother spoke; but as I came forward into the light, I could not help being struck with the expression of his face. His great blue eyes were fixed on Lady Helen's with a look of actual reverence in them, while his lips trembled to keep in smiles too happy to have their way.

Our entrance broke up the conference; Lady Helen rose from her seat and walked to the sofa, wondering what Charlie and Nesta had found to interest them so deeply. When, a very few minutes after, Charlie called on Mr. Carr to come and explain the meaning of a note neither he nor Nesta could



read clearly, she suddenly remembered that the clock had struck ten, and that I must be tired with my journey. Charlie and Mr. Carr both remonstrated, but Lady Helen gained her point and carried Nesta and me off up stairs to bed.

CHAPTER XVI.

" We spoke of other things, we coursed about
The subject most at heart ; more near and near,
Like doves about a dove-cote, wheeling round
The central wish until we settled there."

TENNYSON.

MY only recollection of the four following days is, that during them our party resembled a set of children playing a game of cross purposes. No two of us ever seemed to be on a right understanding with each other. We made various efforts to arrange pleasant excursions for seeing the country and spending our days out of doors, but when the time for carrying them out arrived, it always transpired that some one of the proposed party, generally either Nesta or Mr. Carr, had been misinformed about the hour, and we were compelled to set out on our walk or drive with diminished numbers and with at least one clouded face. Even when we were sauntering in

the garden, or idling in twos and threes in the deep windows of the sitting-rooms, we never seemed to have the power of assorting ourselves into well-arranged groups. The people who were walking or talking with each other always seemed to be watching some one who was talking to some one else. There certainly was a spell upon us: I will not undertake to say what witch's hand laid it. For my own part, I was always vainly endeavouring to relieve Nesta from the *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Moorsom to which she seemed perpetually condemned.

"Why do you let Mr. Moorsom monopolize you so completely?" I asked, one day when we were alone together, and I ventured to remark on her want of spirit. "You do not seem to enjoy his society much when you are in it." To my surprise Nesta's eyes filled with tears.

"Why should I not let him talk to me if he likes it?" she asked. "No one else does now. How foolish it would be in me to expect the cleverest people to care to talk to me; it might happen for a little time, but that could only be by chance, you know."

"At all events, it cannot be by chance that the stupidest person in the company is able to bore

you exclusively," I said, indignantly. "It must be by Lady Helen's contrivance."

"Why should you think so, Janet? Lady Helen does not leave me to him more than other people do; so please don't say any more about it."

I could have said much more if Nesta's "please" had not kept me silent; I could have said we had a host as well as a hostess, and that I thought Mr. Carr discharged his duties very ill. It was not for want of observation either. Whatever he might be doing—whether he were seated at the reading-table turning over the leaves of a book, or standing in the window, as he sometimes did by the hour, lazily tossing the tassel of the blind backwards and forwards—he always, I was convinced, knew the precise moment when either Nesta or Mr. Moorsom entered the room. His eye always followed them about till Nesta, like a frightened bird, was caught in the snare; he saw her feeble little efforts to escape, and noted with a kind of satisfaction, I thought, the disappointed look that came over her face when she resigned herself to her lot. Yet he rarely, very rarely, interfered to help her.

On the last day of this tedious week, Charlie and I laid a plot to free Nesta for a few hours from her

inevitable companion. It was a lovely morning, and we agreed privately, before breakfast, that we three would escape from the house early and enjoy a long ramble over the marsh and on the beach. We carefully avoided giving a hint of our intention during breakfast, and succeeded in meeting at the front door without provoking any questions; over-caution against one peril, however, brought another upon us. While we were waiting on the door-step for what Charlie considered a safe opportunity for stealing across the garden to the shade of the wood, without being spied by either Mr. or Miss Moorsom, Mr. Carr put his head out of his study window, and called Charlie to come to him—

“ Were we going down to the shore, the three of us?—what a fine day for a walk!—would a fourth spoil our party?” and Mr. Carr was half out of the window, while Charlie’s eager assurance that we should be delighted to have his company, brought a vivid colour into Nesta’s cheek. Then came a demur, and Mr. Carr retreated into his study again. After all he could not get his hat without being seen by the whole party in the breakfast-room, and bringing them upon us; it was perhaps wiser to let us go alone.

But, no ; Charlie felt his honour concerned in baffling Miss Moorsom's sharp eyes. He undertook to bring the hat by the back way, and to cover the retreat of the whole party to the wood if we would leave it all to him.

He slipped away on his errand, and Nesta looked distressfully at me.

"Had we not better go back, and leave Charlie and Mr. Carr to take their walk alone?"

Now I had set my heart on a walk that morning, and I would not understand Nesta's scruples.

"It was ridiculous," I said, "to be turned from our plan so easily. Why should not Mr. Carr walk in his own wood if he liked?"

Before we had finished whispering, Charlie appeared, creeping cautiously round the house with Mr. Carr's white straw hat stuck on the top of his own brown one. His affectation of extreme caution was so ridiculous, that we could not help laughing—laughing, but not winning—we had lingered ten minutes too long. Lady Helen heard our laughter as she was crossing the hall from the breakfast-room, and came forward, smiling, to learn its cause.

"Laughter sounded so pleasant in that dull old house," she said.

We could give but a lame excuse for our merri-
ment, but she was all graciousness.

"No matter what we laughed at, so long as we
laughed. The prospect of a walk was enough to
put us in spirits. And had we really succeeded in
conquering Shafto's laziness so far as to induce him
to be of the party? that was a triumph for us, in-
deed! Were we waiting for Miss Moorsom? No!
but she was the person of all others who would
enjoy such a walk. It would be unkind to leave
her out. Would not Nesta run and tell her to get
ready? or, stay, it would not do to make the walk-
ing party too large; perhaps, it would be best for
dear little Nesta to give up her place to Miss Moor-
som?" Mr. Moorsom had promised to bud some
roses in the garden; Lady Helen must, she said,
"stay to watch the operation, and she should really
be obliged to Nesta if she would keep her company.
Not that she would have asked such a thing if she
had not felt sure that a walk to the shore and back
was quite too much for Nesta!"

The last sentence of this long discourse was ad-
dressed to me alone; before Lady Helen reached
it Mr. Carr had retreated into the depths of his
study, from which he did not emerge for several

hours ; Nesta had gone to seek Miss Moorsom, and Charlie had turned his back upon us, and was hiding a very cloudy face by appearing wholly occupied in restoring shape to the crown of his cap, which had suffered in its contact with Mr. Carr's. In the end, Charlie, Miss Moorsom, and I were the only walkers, and as we did not start till an hour later than we had at first proposed, we had the sunniest part of the morning for our walk, missed the high tide, and came home hot, weary, and cross with each other. The gardening party seemed to have fared better than we ; Lady Helen and Mr. Moorsom declared that they had passed a most enjoyable morning, while Nesta's little pale face wore no other trace of disappointment than a slight shade of added weariness, which Lady Helen could easily attribute to the heat.

After luncheon we all assisted for an hour or so in such of the gardening operations as still remained unfinished ; and when we were tired we adjourned to Nesta's favourite seat, under a large mulberry tree, which stood at the end of the lawn, close to a pond covered with water-lilies. Here we might have spent the rest of the afternoon very pleasantly. Mr. Moorsom was obliged to go into the house to

write some letters; Lady Helen soon followed him; Miss Moorsom shut her eyes, and leaned her head against a branch of the tree: and just as she dropped into a doze, Mr. Carr, whom we had not seen since the morning, sauntered down the long walk with a book in his hand, and offered to come and read aloud to us.

He soon found a seat on the grass by Nesta's feet, and began to read. He was a very good reader, and his book was a volume of the "Faery Queen." We were just beginning, thanks to his comments, to understand and enjoy the passage he had selected, when we were disturbed by the sound of tripping steps coming down the walk, and Mdlle. Justine's inquisitive face appeared between the overhanging branches.

"*Mille pardons!* She was so sorry to disturb us, but her lady had sent her to look for Miss Ernestine. Her ladyship was desolated that Miss Ernestine should have stayed out so long, and entreated her to go and sit with her in the boudoir, that she might assure herself she was resting."

I had an excuse ready, but Ernestine put her hand over my mouth, and rose to follow Justine, saying merely, as she looked back,

"You and Charlie can hear the rest of the canto quite as well without me."

We did not hear it, however. Mr. Carr held the book in his hand and sat with us for some minutes longer, but we heard nothing but the quick impatient tap of his foot against the gravel, and the snap of little branches of the tree which he kept breaking off and tossing from him. At last he rose and walked back to the house, thrusting the branches of the tree aside with such vehemence as he left the arbour, that Miss Moorsom's head was shaken rudely from its resting-place, and brought into sharp contact with her knee. Soon afterwards Miss Moorsom retreated in-doors, somewhat out of humour at her uncere- monious waking, and Charlie and I were left to grumble to each other at the odd arrangements of this house, which, while leaving every person the appearance of perfect freedom, never, in reality, permitted any two to do as they liked for ten minutes without interruption.

So that bright summer day was wasted. The evening brought us some relief. Lady Helen having over-fatigued herself by her ceaseless exertions during the day, was obliged to retire to her room immediately after dinner; and we young people drew

round the open drawing-room window with a more sociable feeling than was at all common in the Broadlands atmosphere.

From chatting pleasantly, we somehow or other—I fear it was Charlie's and my doing—drifted into an argument in which we all grew eager.

Miss Moorsom brought out, to show Nesta, a present her brother had lately given her. It was a copy of Tupper's "Proverbial Philosophy," and Charlie and I, being in a pugnacious mood, resisted hotly her determination to make us praise her favourite author.

She could not long have stood up against our vehemence if her brother had not come to her help, and defended his choice of a present rather pertinaciously. After a time, I hardly know how, our argument drifted from the question first started. We proceeded to examine the matter instead of the manner of some of our favourite authors, and found ourselves engaged on graver subjects than we had at first intended to speak about.

As the discussion widened and deepened I found myself slipping round to my opponent's side. He had not always the best of the argument; he was not so brilliant as Charlie, and he did not always see immediately the drift of the remarks which Mr. Carr

let fall—remarks which seemed designed to moderate the zeal of the disputants, but which always had the effect of drawing us into deeper and more troubled waters. He was often silenced for a time, but he kept firm hold of his opinions, and defended them with solid sense and right feeling against Charlie's ridicule and Mr. Carr's metaphysics. I could not help thinking that his earnest, reverent temper of mind contrasted very favourably with Charlie's lightness; and with the weary acquiescence in a supposed impossibility of ever knowing or believing anything thoroughly, which Mr. Carr professed.

I wondered whether Nesta's thoughts were taking the same direction as mine. I noticed that whenever Mr. Carr spoke she raised her head eagerly, and dropped it as he went on. She was always hoping he would say something she could sympathize with, and feeling disappointed when the expected words did not come. Once, when directly appealed to, she gave her verdict in favour of some argument of Mr. Moorsom's, but it was spoken falteringly. How eagerly he bent forward to hear, and how his face brightened up! I felt that, little as Nesta took part in the discussion, it was her silent presence that gave it all its interest—to two, at least, of the disputants. A sigh

of hers ended it at length. Mr. Carr, who had been the last speaker, jumped up hastily.

"We are all tired; let us go into the garden," he said.

I thought the whole party followed his example, but I was mistaken. Miss Moorsom detained Charlie and her brother to look for some wraps for her; and so it fell out that Nesta, Mr. Carr, and I found ourselves pacing up and down the moonlit garden together. Nesta took my arm and clung to me, Mr. Carr walked by my side. For a turn or two we were silent. When Mr. Carr spoke he did not resume the old subject. He began to discuss Mr. Moorsom's character, and the effect his opinions had upon it, as if we three had been in accord. "New and old," he said to himself, musingly, "how wonderfully the two influences have combined to form our friend's character. He is a specimen of the English tendency to cling to old modes of thought and traditional opinions, and yet to allow the spirit of the new to pervade and change them, till only the outward form remains the same. He thinks himself a champion of old opinions, and would perhaps single me out as one of those who are trying to overturn them: he is mistaken. The contrary rather is true. I am one of the standers-

still—one of the lingerers and doubters—from whom everything falls. It has been the temper of mind of my family for the last hundred years. See how we have fared in worldly things; we have had no tenacity to hold even those. His family have been gaining, while we have been losing, till at last they have pushed us, who once owned the whole county, to this little strip of marsh-land next the sea. I, for my part, can acknowledge readily that it is time we were made to vanish all together. I cannot be very heartily conservative, when I feel that I myself am a representative of one of the worn-out powers that deserve to be overthrown—reverenced once, but not to be reverenced any longer.”

“It is your own fault,” I said, eagerly. “If your family has lost influence and honour and prosperity, has it not been because they failed to use them well when they had them? May not the failure have risen from that very want of firm faith in something higher than themselves, which you confessed this evening? If they had reverenced rightly, might they not have continued worthy of reverence?”

“Perhaps so,” he said; “I do not know. I, at least, have fallen on an evil inheritance. I have seen everything crumbling round me—a fallen family keep-

ing up hollow appearances of prosperity—false pretensions to distinctions and nobleness, which eat away the possibility of true nobleness, because they are false.”

“But, surely, with the gifts you have——”

He shook his head. “What have I?—‘an angry fancy!’—nay, I think that has been the worst misfortune to me of all. It has been like all my other possessions—a name, instead of a reality! Fairy gold, which when it is wanted for use turns to dust!”

“I think it is wrong and ungrateful to speak of any gift in that way,” I said; “you know in your heart you do not wish you were without it. If you never do more than write one poem, which only a few people are the better for, you ought to be thankful for being allowed to do that. It may be the thing God meant you to do.”

“You are right; that is the true and noble way of looking at it, but one wants some one every now and then to say such words.”


We took a turn in silence, and then Nesta spoke in a tremulous voice, Mr. Carr leaning over to catch every word.

“I wanted to say one thing just now, only you have rather turned the conversation away.”

“Say it, please.”

"I wanted to ask, is it not puzzling yourself to mix so many things together? You talk of old opinions and new, and then of your family having lost everything, Janet says, for want of reverence and faith. But, surely, that last want need not be an inheritance. If we say exactly what we mean, and call it faith in God—belief in all the good news He has revealed to us, does it not seem clear that it is a possession we each must strive after for ourselves, one that you ought not to talk of wanting without the greatest sorrow and fear?"

"I do speak sorrowfully," he said, "but can one change one's nature? can one alter one's experience? Having been brought up in a loveless, earthly home, can I have faith in heavenly love? Do I know anything about it? One must go step by step—first the lower, then the higher faith. The best things here first; and then from knowledge and experience of these, truths which no logic can establish dawn upon the soul. So, at least, I think it will have to be with me. My education began at the wrong end; but sometimes I see a chance of going back so far, that I may start fair again. Do you remember how Gerda, the Giant Maiden of Jotenheim, learned to believe there was such a place as Asgard?"



“No,” I answered; “I don’t know what you mean.”

“Let us sit down on this seat under the window, then, and let me explain my meaning. You know I am a tale-teller by profession; since you bid me value my gift, you must let me exercise it.”

“One evening, in the days when the city of Asgard still stood on the earth, and when gods and heroes lived in it, it chanced that Frey, the summer-king, climbed Odin’s lofty air-throne, and standing on tiptoe there, looked over the earth and the sea, and far away to Giant-land. As he looked, the heavens were flooded with a sudden light, and Frey perceived that the splendour came from the uplifted arms of a beautiful giant-maiden, who was at that moment fastening the door-latch of her father’s house among the ice-mountains. Dazzled by the radiance of her fair face and wondrously white arms, Frey fell in love with the giant-maiden, whose name was Gerda, and resolved to send a messenger next day to Giant-land, to entreat her to become his wife, and reign with him over Summer-home, his bright kingdom.

“The silver-tongued Skirnir undertook to carry the invitation. After incredible perils he reached the

cold, misty regions where Gerda's giant father lived, and introduced himself to the presence of the maiden. Then he thought all the difficulties of his enterprise were over. Filled with horror of the frightful scenes he had witnessed, he thought he had only to make known his master's gracious invitation, and the giant-maiden would gladly escape with him from her dark and gloomy dwelling.

“‘So he spoke, and she listened; but when he finished speaking, she listened still, smiling always the same amused, incredulous, childish smile. It was to her like the sweet ringing of bells; she liked to hear, but she had no power to understand. What were Gods of Asgard and Summer-home to her, who had never in all her life seen anything but giants and ice mountains? Seeing how little his words were comprehended, Skirnir would have despaired, if an expedient had not presented itself to his mind.

“‘He carried in his drinking-horn a picture of Frey, which he had drawn up cunningly with some water from a stream in which the summer-king's face was reflected. As a last hope he poured this water into a deep goblet, and handing it to Gerda, bade her look in. She looked, and Frey's face looked back at her; loving glances came from the pictured eyes; the

parted lips, though motionless, conveyed fond words to her ear. She put down the goblet; the meaningless smile had left her face for ever. Skirnir no longer spoke in vain, she was ready to set out with him to Asgard; for she had looked on a face that loved her, and the existence of Summer-home, and of all good and beautiful things, had become plain to her in that moment.'

"There, that is the end of my tale; I wonder whether the Icelandic Skald, who first told it, saw all the meaning in it that I do? Whether he told it to some pious Christian maiden to make her understand his creed—which must always be the creed of a Skald—that love is the only revealer of truth and wisdom, and must always precede faith."

I was the first to speak.

"It is a beautiful story," I said, "but I think that you narrow its meaning, if you suppose that human love only can help us to realize the unseen. I see a great deal more in the story than you do, and so I am sure did your Icelandic Skald."

"And you," Mr. Carr said, turning to Nesta, "if you had been the Norse maiden, to whom the story was told, what should you have said?"

"If the Skald had been a heathen, I should have

been too unhappy about him to have listened to stories," Nesta answered. "I should not have let him put love first; I should have told him it was trifling to think of poetry, or stories, or anything, but learning to be a Christian; at least, I hope I should have said so." Here Nesta, who had been looking down, suddenly raised her face, so that the full light of the moon shone upon it; it was pale and troubled, as I had never seen it before.

Mr. Carr started, and sprang up from his seat.

"One would think we had been telling ghost stories instead of fairy tales," he said, "such a fit of seriousness has fallen over us all. That comes of telling tales by moonlight, or perhaps of three such imaginative people as we are, telling tales at all; we forget they are tales, and mistake them for earnest, for Miss Ernestine's most earnest earnest."

"It is time we all went in," I said quickly; "come, Nesta."

But she had already passed through the open window without looking round. Mr. Carr lingered to gather two half-blown roses, and to remark on the superior fragrance of night-blowing flowers. When he wished us good-night at the drawing-room door, he gave one of the blossoms to me, and offered the

other to Nesta, at the same time that he placed a candle he had lighted for us in her hand. Nesta took the candle, but would not see the flower. It was offered again with an eager, imploring look, and thrown pettishly to the ground when she, with still downcast eyes, repeated her quiet good-night, and moved towards the staircase. I thought she would have acted better if she had taken the flower as a matter of course, as I had done.

CHAPTER XVII.

“Love took up the glass of Time and turned it in his glowing hands,
Every moment lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands.”

TENNYSON.

THE next morning Mr. and Miss Moorsom returned to Deepdale, and with their departure began our happiest week at Broadlands. Stay, I don't mean to insinuate that our happiness resulted mainly from being relieved of their presence. I am obliged to confess that our golden days owed their brightness to a cause which ought to have had the effect of depressing instead of raising our spirits.

Over-fatigue and anxiety brought on Lady Helen an attack of illness which confined her to her room for several days; and I am sorry to say we were all hard-hearted enough to enjoy extremely the sense of freedom which came upon us when we knew ourselves to be secure from the over-looking of her satirical eyes.

Nesta and I were not remiss in trying to make ourselves useful to the invalid when we were permitted to see her, but that was only for short intervals at a time; and during the many other hours of the bright days, we were at full liberty to make the most of our country holiday. A holiday-spirit seemed to have come over us all. Charlie was as wildly gay as he had ever been in the happiest of our home-holiday times. As for Mr. Carr, I used to wonder what had come to him during that week. He was the gayest, the youngest of us all—the most eager to turn each bright morning and sunny afternoon to the best account for a nutting-ramble, or a visit to a distant harvest-field, where the first gleanings of the year were to be gathered; or for taking advantage of the low tide for a long walk on the shore. The sight of woods in their variegated autumn dress, or of a flat stretch of sand steeped in the golden afternoon light of September sunshine, never fails to bring back to me the recollection of those happy, idle days spent in almost ceaseless talk. We always kept together in our rambles—a compact party of four. There were no *têtes-à-têtes*, no manifest preference of one companion by another. Our arguments, our jokes, our undisguised interest in each

other's thoughts and pleasures, we shared, or seemed to share, in common. Perhaps, if it had not been so, some fears of mine, or some scruples of Nesta's, would have arisen to trouble our freedom. As it was, I allowed scruples and fears for the future to rest, and gave myself up to the spirit of enjoyment that had come upon us ;—four young imaginative people, full of each other, with minds awake to every charm of nature, eager to catch up and follow out every picturesque fancy, every suggestion of deeper thought which originated with one or the other ; and among us that wonderful sense of accord—of vivid interest about trifles—of childlike joy, which sometimes hovers over a whole party when any two of the number are living under the magic influence of a yet unconfessed love. One spoken word, and the charm for the bystanders is broken ; but till that word is said, the spell is often potent enough to affect the moral atmosphere of a whole household.

It was not strange, perhaps, that Charlie and I concerned ourselves little with anything but the amusements of the hours as they passed ; but I was much surprised, when I came to think it over afterwards, that Lady Helen's vigilance slept so long—

that she could, for six days, have concerned herself so little about what we were doing. She was, it is true, suffering terribly all the time from severe neuralgic pain, attacks of which often prostrated her for weeks together, and she, of all persons I ever knew, was the most afraid of pain, and the most completely conquered by it. I have known her more than once lay aside schemes on which her heart was set, if a threatening of illness warned her that her exertions were bringing upon her the pain she was always dreading. I used to think her cowardly. I did not know then how terrible were the sufferings she had to fear.

I am afraid we were not very sympathizing at that time, but we did not know how wearily our bright days passed with Lady Helen. Our liberty came to an end suddenly, and not too soon perhaps, for I remember that during our last walk from the shore we fell into a conversation which caused me some misgiving and embarrassment. We were late in leaving the beach on that day, and we stood a moment at the gate leading into the wood, to look at the wide stretch of marsh land between us and the sea, from which the last crimson rays of the sun were fading. Mr. Carr had taught us all to admire the colouring

of these marshes—the purple in the distance where the sea-mist hung, the vivid green in the foreground broken by patches of chocolate-coloured feathery topped rushes. As we looked, the crimson light which lay like a garment over the level plain went in a moment, and the blue grey mist of twilight came down in its place. Charlie exclaimed on the sudden disappearance of the sunshine; Nesta, in reply, pointed out a bank of clouds still purple, crimson, and gold with sunset light.

“ They have got it all to themselves,” she said. “ How solid they look resting on the sea! What a pity it is we are all so terribly wise; if we were not, I think we should be tempted to get into a boat and sail out to them. I can just remember when I used really to believe that heaven was there.”

Mr. Carr looked at her, smiling. “ Is that so very long ago?” he said. “ Are we so terribly wise? I don't know. I think I am disposed still sometimes to mistake cloudland for heaven; it seems very solid if one looks long enough at it, as we have been doing lately. One grows loth to believe that it would prove very unsubstantial, misty, and cold if one succeeded in getting there.”

Nesta looked puzzled, not knowing what to make

of the remark, and Mr. Carr turned abruptly from her and entered the wood first. He kept a little before us nearly all the way home; sometimes walking very quickly, sometimes pausing to draw down a branch of a tree and stand for a moment looking at its leaves as if he were absorbed in admiring the delicate tracery of their veins, then tossing the branch impatiently from him and hurrying on again. We lost sight of him at last, but met him again at the gate which opened from the wood into the Broadlands garden.

"Are you in a hurry to go in?" he said, when we had passed through the gate. "It is not late; let us take one turn down the lime-tree walk to the pond; we must have one more nosegay of water-lilies."

Nesta hesitated a moment, and when we did turn towards the pond she walked quickly. Mr. Carr put his hand before her to check her speed.

"No, not so fast," he said. "I have been setting you a bad example, but I have been repenting it during the last ten minutes. Shall I tell you what I was thinking of as I stood at the gate?"

Seeing that Nesta was disposed to remain silent, I answered for her—"Yes, if you please."

"Well, I was wondering over the strange per-

versity which makes us so often linger over disagreeable things as if we were determined to taste them thoroughly; while we are generally rather in a hurry to live through our happiest hours; and are often foolish enough to throw away or give up a very great pleasure when we suspect that it is offered us for the last time. I have been in one of these perverse moods this evening: because it occurred to me that these pleasant days must come to an end sooner or later, I have spoiled for myself the last hours of this one. It is a great pity that one can't be reasonable, that one can't enjoy things just enough not to make it too bitter to give them up."

"Do you think so?" said Nesta, gently. "Do you think it a pity? I am not sure that I do. I should not choose to be able to give up without being sorry. I think I had rather keep a regret all my life, than let any remembrance I loved die away." This was a long speech for Nesta, and the effort of making it brought a delicate rose flush to her cheek.

I hastened to put in my word. "It is all very well," I said, "to be sentimental over real losses; but I agree with Mr. Carr—one ought to be able to enjoy a pleasant idle holiday with summer friends

without spoiling the last days of it by thinking how soon it will be over."

"A pleasant idle holiday with summer friends," Mr. Carr exclaimed, taking up my words. "That is your expression, not mine—your idea of the worth and stability of our liking for each other. Summer friends! holiday friends! Well I have never had any other in my life yet, I suppose I have no right to expect more."

"You have no right to misunderstand my expression so perversely," I answered. "I said 'summer friends,' and I meant, as you know, the friends of a summer. I do not see how we are to stretch out our acquaintanceship to cover a longer time than that."

"Let it be so. I have no wish to stretch it out. I have a great contempt for a valuation of liking which can be measured by time. If a friendship cannot make its own time, one day a thousand years, I want nothing of it. I quarrelled with your word because it had something ominous in its sound to me. I have a sort of superstition about summer; each one has its own individuality to me, and I mourn the death of one as if I were mourning for a friend who will never come again. 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended'—those words have always had an

extraordinary pathos for me ; every wail of October wind repeats them. When this summer goes down, and takes more, so much more than any other has ever done, how dreary, how long the winter will be, how doubly dark for the past brightness ! ”

During this speech, Mr. Carr, who had been hitherto walking near me, contrived to bring himself round to Nesta's side. He lowered his voice as if for her hearing only, and seemed to expect an answer from her when he ceased speaking. None came, Nesta paced slowly on with her eyes fixed on the ground, and I made an effort to put an end to a conversation that was beginning to trouble me.

“ We are passing the pond,” I said ; “ If you mean to gather any water-lilies you had better stop and get them.”

My remark brought my companions to a stand, but that was all. They remained for some minutes silently looking at the water. Nesta spoke first.

“ We need not stay, there are no water-lilies in flower. I don't think we shall ever get any more ; they are over for the year,” she said, sadly.

“ Ah ! they are summer friends,” said Mr. Carr.

“ But we must not blame them for that,” said Nesta, quickly. “ When the sun shone warm upon

them, they gave us their best blossoms; when he ceases to shine, what can they do, but slip down and hide themselves in the water?"

"Nay, there is one," I interrupted; "you are not really looking—there, under the willow branch. If you are too lazy to get it, I will."

The lily proved less easy to reach than I had expected, and before we had secured it, Charlie, who had been to the house, returned to look for us. His spirit of enterprise drew us into a prolonged search for water-flowers, so that Nesta's hands and mine were laden with gay flags and half-blown lilies, when, talking and laughing a little eagerly over our exploits, we emerged from the shade of the lime-trees on to the lawn in front of the house.

I dare say we looked a very happy party, to an invalid who had been shut out from fresh air and pleasant company for several days. Lady Helen, at least, seemed to have thought it worth while to make an unusual effort to look at us. She had had her sofa wheeled to the window of her boudoir for the first time that day, and when I looked up, on entering the house, I saw that she had raised the blind a little with her hand, and was leaning forward from her couch to command a good view of the lime-tree walk

and the garden. It is, perhaps, natural to feel rather saddened than exhilarated by the sight of mirth from which one is excluded, and it may have struck Lady Helen that her son and her guests showed an unsympathizing disposition, to enjoy themselves while she was suffering. There was certainly an expression of pique on her face when Nesta and I came to her room after dinner to sit with her till bed-time. We had hurried from the dinner-table, but with all our haste we were a quarter of an hour later than usual, and Lady Helen did not fail to make us observe this. "It was fortunate for her," she said, "that she should not be obliged to tax the charity of her friends for amusement much longer; no one ought to be ill for more than a week, or at least no one should expect to be nursed and considered longer." Lady Helen said "she perceived that she had now had her week's nursing; on the morrow she meant to come downstairs and be well. Nesta might sing, and I might read aloud to her for one more evening—on the morrow *she* would wait upon *us*."

Poor Nesta listened to these bitter speeches with a face full of remorse, and sang her songs in a tearful voice. I, feeling sure that Lady Helen would not permit herself the excitement of being angry

with us, if she were not really stronger and freer from pain, read aloud with my usual emphasis, and enjoyment of the very pleasant book Mr. Carr had selected for our reading. On previous evenings Lady Helen had made an effort to listen, saying that she found it more easy to compose herself to sleep if her mind had been filled during her last waking hours with any other person's thoughts than her own. That night she was restless and inattentive, and in about half an hour stopped me in the middle of a sentence. "There, that will do, I can't listen to such twaddle, now I am beginning to feel alive again. Could you be so obliging as to hand me my letters?—they are all on that little table. Thank you! Now Nesta had better go to bed, and you may stay with me while I look them over."

As Nesta left the room Lady Helen looked after her, observed that she was pale, and expressed a hope that I had not allowed her to over-fatigue herself with walking. "How had we been spending our time while she was too ill to think about us?"

I bore the scrutinizing look as unconcernedly as I could, and Lady Helen turned to her letters. It was the accumulation of several days; the greater number she threw back on the table unopened, some she just

glanced at; the two she reserved for careful reading seemed to engage her attention pleasantly. Her brow smoothed as she read; and when she came to the last word of the last letter she was so beaming with satisfaction that she was disposed to impart some of it to me. "Good news from Morfa!" she said. "This long letter is from Mr. Lester—good friend that he is! How few people of his age trouble themselves to write such long letters!"

"Is Rosamond better?" I asked. "Mamma did not give a good report of her when she wrote last. What does Mr. Lester say?"

"Let me see" (glancing back at the letter)—"no, he does not give a good report of Rosamond's health. He says she makes very little progress towards recovery, and that the doctors are puzzled. They are disposed to attribute their want of success to some mental cause—to some anxiety or trouble weighing on her mind. Mr. Lester writes this to me frankly. I suppose I ought to call it bad news, but, my dear Janet, I have already given you a peep behind the scenes, so you will understand me. He ends his letter by an invitation to Shafto to return to Morfa. He implies that his coming will be the best remedy for Rosamond's want of spirits, and

seems a little surprised that he should have kept away so long. Come, Janet, why are you silent? I expect a little sympathy from you; you are young enough to take an interest in love troubles, and ought to rejoice in the prospect of a happy ending to our Morfa romance."

I had seated myself on a footstool by Lady Helen's couch while she read her letters. During her last speech I betook myself to platting and unplaiting the fringe of her cushion, affecting to be too intent on making the ends of my plats correspond to have attention to spare for anything else. Lady Helen at last leaned down from her sofa, put her long finger under my chin, and said, half-playfully, half-imperiously, "Look up, Janet! I will know what you are thinking of!—you shall answer me!"

"Well, then, if you will have it, I am thinking that when I write a romance, I will not permit my heroine to be depressed in spirits on account of the absence of a lover, who meanwhile can enjoy pleasant society and fine weather very thoroughly, though she is ill. If any one is to be in despair in my romance, it shall be the gentleman, not the lady."

"Then, let me tell you, your romance will not be

true to nature. Silly child ! do you really think that love is ever as much to men as it is to women ? Do you expect to find a lover who will eat or drink less, or refuse to be amused in consequence of anything you may be suffering ? You have still to learn that 'men must work, and women must weep.' "

"No ; I am quite willing that men should work, but I think there should be *some* proportion in feeling. I do not envy Rosamond Lester."

"That is fortunate, for no envy could give you her fate. I do not consider her attachment to Shafto disproportionate, and certainly not the least unaccountable, though, as you know, I am not so fond a mother as to be blind to my son's deficiencies."

"And you are sure that his deficiencies do not include a want of love for the bride you have chosen for him ?" I asked, platting away diligently at my fringe as I spoke.

"What makes you think so ?" asked Lady Helen, sharply ; "but stay, you need not answer. I can answer myself. Shafto's manner has misled you. You don't understand him. Take care that you do not come to false conclusions about his feelings and intentions. He may not be what you would call in love with Rosamond Lester, but he likes her well

enough, and he is quite alive to the advantages of marrying her. He will make an excellent husband for her—now mind, I say for *her*, not for any one else. He will make a good husband to a girl like Rosamond, who, having all the externals of a smooth easy life secured to her, will never make embarrassing claims upon him ; but Janet, I should pity his wife if she were called on to share a life of poverty and struggle with him. She would find him a broken reed to lean upon. Shafto may say what he likes about himself, but he is not capable of bearing up against petty cares. If he were to marry a poor woman, I should indeed pity his wife."

Once more Lady Helen bent down, and lifted up my face with her finger. This time I looked boldly up, and said, emphatically, "So should I."

"We are agreed then, and I am glad of it. There, help me to lie down again. Why have I excited myself so? How quickly my pulse beats! Let us choose another topic, and don't say anything to agitate me. The letter I first read concerns you more than me. I want to speak to you about it. It is from Mr. Moorsom."

"Indeed!" I said, drily.

"You have no curiosity to hear what he writes to

me? You do not think it concerns you or Nesta?"

"I hope not. I should be sorry if I thought it did."

"Well, don't look so solemn; there is no occasion to be so very dignified about it. Charming as Nesta is, she will find that admirers who have so much to recommend them as Mr. Moorsom are easily discouraged; and above all things, we must not be premature. There is nothing formidable in my letter after all. Since you have no curiosity about its contents, you shall only hear Lady Moorsom's postscript. She invites us to pay her a three days' visit at Deepdale, and begs that if I am not well enough to leave home, I will permit you and Nesta to go alone."

"If you are not well enough, and if we have a choice," I began—

"I do not think I can give you a choice. I must not let you make yourselves ridiculous, and since there is no good reason why you should not stay three days at Deepdale, it would be ridiculous to refuse to go. It would look conscious, which you have no business to be. Nesta is not. I dare say you will have a very uneventful visit; and I can promise you that Mr. Moorsom will not break his heart when

you come away. People don't break their hearts so easily."

"But we had rather not go to Deepdale," I persisted.

"My dear, I am sorry to thwart you, but I cannot help it. Lady Moorsom will be offended if you do not go, and besides, to tell you the truth, three days' complete rest will be a boon to me; and Shafto, seeing me disembarrassed of my guests, will feel at liberty to set off at once to Morfa, as he ought to do. Now I will send for Shafto, for I shall not rest to-night till I have talked over Mr. Lester's letter with him. But oh! what am I doing?—the pain again! It shot like a dagger through my head. I must not attempt to see Shafto. Take all the letters away—quite out of my sight—and read to me, Janet: anything to keep me from thinking."

I don't know whether the reading had the desired effect on Lady Helen. It certainly did not keep me from thinking. I read on mechanically till long past midnight. Misgivings, which I had thrust aside during the past week, came back with double force upon me now, and would be looked at. I felt that we were unwelcome guests in Lady Helen's house, and hated the thought of remaining so; yet when I

turned over in my mind various schemes for escaping, I could not fix on any one that satisfied me. I had had several letters from my father since he arrived in Edinburgh. In all he spoke hopefully of the good he expected to derive from Dr. Allison's advice, if only he could remain long enough under his care to give his remedies a fair trial. I could not bear the thought of cutting short his holiday, or spoiling it by writing to him about our difficulties; the least hint of them would, I knew, bring him home at once. Neither did my mother's or Hilary's letters hold out any hope of a speedy family re-union. Rosamond Lester still continued in a precarious state of health, and my mother, influenced, I could see, by Hilary, and overawed by Mr. Lester, appeared to consider it impossible that she should be permitted to leave Morfa till Rosamond believed herself well enough to do without her. I feared Hilary would never forgive me if I urged her to return home; and I was myself very reluctant to do so till I was absolutely obliged. Lady Helen fell asleep before I had come to any determination; and I crept softly to my room, glad, at all events, not to be obliged to trouble Nesta with my perplexities that night.

I rose early the next morning, and contrived to

have some private talk with Charlie before breakfast, but I could not get him to see my difficulty in a serious light. "Lady Helen had always been very kind to him," he said; "he had never heard a word that could lead him to suppose she was tired of our company. Why should she be? It must be a fancy of mine, and Charlie wished heartily that I would not have such uncomfortable fancies. It would be a dreadful bore to go back to London; and for his part he would never forgive me if I did anything to cut short the pleasantest visit he had ever had in his life. If I must invent romances, he wished I would not mix Nesta and him up in them." My own suspicions were not altered by Charlie's incredulity, but I felt afraid of acting on an opinion which no one shared, and determined to let events take their course, rather than bring on myself the responsibility of interfering.

Lady Helen did not appear at breakfast, but she sent me a note to say that she had arranged to send us over to Deepdale in the afternoon of the next day. To escape the necessity of accompanying us, Charlie announced an intention of paying a three days' visit to the house of his college friend with whom he had stayed before Nesta came to Norfolk.

He recollected suddenly that he owed this friend some attention, and proposed to spend the morning in riding over to call upon him.

We saw nothing of either Lady Helen or Mr. Carr during the morning. Mr. Carr breakfasted with his mother in her boudoir, and remained in close conference with her for two hours. We afterwards saw him pacing, hatless, up and down the garden, in an apparently very restless mood of mind. Being myself indisposed for any useful occupation that morning, I could not help watching him as he wandered to and fro on the lawn, snatching at the drooping branches of the lime-trees as he passed under them, and tossing away the leaves spoilt and crumpled in his hand. Sometimes he walked up and down the gravelled path beneath the window of the drawing-room, where Nesta and I were sitting. More than once he passed the open window slowly, paused, made a movement as if he were going to enter, and then walked away again.

It was certainly nothing to us that he should give himself so much unnecessary exercise in the hot sun, yet I could not but perceive that his restlessness affected Nesta. She started whenever the sound of his footsteps were heard on the gravel walk, and

changed her occupation so often, that I was driven at last to ask what ailed her.

Perhaps she only shared the mood that pervaded the whole household. Every one was restless on that day, as if to make up for the pleasant tranquillity of the last week. The sound of Lady Helen's bell, pulled hastily, came from the upper regions every ten minutes. Justine must have spent her morning on the stairs, for every time I looked from the drawing-room door, which was rather frequently, I saw her smart figure ascending or descending, or encountered her peering eyes as she paused on the landing to take a general survey of the house. Was it part of her business, I wondered, to acquaint her mistress with the use we were making of our time that idle morning?

At luncheon, Lady Helen joined us, beautifully dressed, smiling, and bland—a little more pale and worn than when she had sat at the head of the table a week before, but keeping no trace of the irritability of the previous evening. "I was her clever Janet, and Nesta her sweet one—her pretty one; and Charlie must tell her the news, and join her in scolding Shafto for bringing a moody face to greet her re-appearance among us."

She was gracious to everybody, but her manner to her son was almost beseeching. She laid little traps to draw him into conversation with her. She tried to catch his eye, and once, when she had found a pretext for moving down to his end of the room, she placed her hand caressingly on his shoulder. It was the only time I ever saw the least outward show of affection from her to him.

He tried hard to sustain himself in silence and ill-humour. I think he had entered the dining-room determined to say as little as possible, but Lady Helen's unwonted gentleness surprised him into amiability before the luncheon-hour was over.

We drove out in the afternoon, and when we returned it was time to dress for dinner. We had a hasty dressing, for we heard Lady Helen go down stairs before we had been a quarter of an hour in our room. I hastened after her, leaving Nesta—who that day seemed to have lost all her usual deftness, and to find insuperable difficulties in the arrangement of her hair and the tying of her sash—to descend alone.

It cost Lady Helen a great effort to sit up during the dinner-hour. Why did she make it? I was

learning now to know her face, and to read its expression through the mask of gaiety and good-humour she would at times assume. I noticed the flush of pain burning on her wasted cheeks—the frequent sudden inward pressure of her lips—the contraction of her brows; and I pitied her enough to second her to the best of my power. I did what I could to keep the conversation general, and to avoid the sudden pauses, or the possibility of *tête-à-têtes*, which I saw she dreaded. No allusion was made all the evening to the approaching break-up of our party. Once or twice I observed, with surprise, that Lady Helen, in speaking to her son of plans for future days, seemed to take it for granted that we should soon all be together again. She appeared to forget, or to wish us to forget, that Mr. Carr would have left Broadlands for Morfa before we returned from Deepdale. At last the clock struck ten, and Lady Helen, insisting that she had never seen any one look so sleepy as Nesta did, marshalled us all up stairs. At the head of the stairs she dismissed Nesta, with a kiss on what she called her sleepy eyes, but requested me to follow her to her room and read her to sleep, as I had done on the previous evening.

I was shocked to see the change that came over Lady Helen when she found herself at last alone with me. She put her lamp down on the nearest table, and sank down on her couch with a half-suppressed groan of weariness and pain.

"Oh Janet! Janet! I have been doing too much I am killing myself, and for nothing! Oh, if I should make myself very ill, and gain nothing by all my struggles! It is terrible to have such strong wishes, and a feverish imagination like mine, always active to suggest every possibility of failure—to make me taste beforehand the bitter cup of disappointment! Oh, to be a stock or a stone, to blunt one's feelings till one could be satisfied to wear life away in getting up, and going to bed, and eating and feeling the sunshine as animals do!"

I suppose I looked shocked, for Lady Helen put up her hand to stop a reply I was beginning.

"Don't answer! A sympathizing face is all you can give me—I don't want advice."

"But, oh, Lady Helen," I cried, "don't you know any state between violent wishes and utter indifference? Would it be impossible to you to be resigned if you were disappointed in this wish you speak of? There is surely such a thing as being resigned!"

"Is there?—people say so—people who have never wished, or who have never been disappointed? But, Janet, I have set my heart for years on attaining one end. I had a wish in my youth—I was disappointed, but never resigned; it has always stood before me as the one desirable object to attain. The possibility of gaining something like my old wish has dawned upon me in middle life—can you wonder if I try hard for it, and refuse to have it again snatched from me? I have brought you here to-night, and I am opening my heart to you, because I know that you are on my side, and it is well that you should see the difficulties that would lie in the way of any one who tried to oppose me. We understand each other, don't we, Janet?"

"I think I understand you. But I should be easier if you would say openly all that is in your mind."

"You are mistaken. We should both of us be much less easy—you understand me, that is enough. And I should not have said all this to you, if I had not known that our interests are the same—that I am serving your cause as well as my own."

"Then I don't understand you. I am not interested in any cause. My only wish just now is that

Nesta and I were safe home again, and that we had done with mysteries."

"You are a wise child, and I am much obliged to you."

Lady Helen lay still, with her eyes shut, for some time, while I read aloud to her. Seeing her more tranquil, at length, I rose to go. As I wished her good night, I asked, "When does Mr. Carr go to Morfa? If he is likely to see mamma and Hilary soon, I should like him to give them news of us. They will think it strange if we do not send any message."

Lady Helen half started from her couch, and put her hand on my arm. "Janet, you were sincere in what you said just now? Yes, I see you are! Then be guided by me—don't ask any questions. Trust your message to your mother to me, and don't waste time to-morrow in useless farewells. There is no use in troubling Shafto to-morrow with messages that he is sure to forget, and good-byes that *may* have to be repeated."

"As you please," I answered coldly. "We are your guests, and you may be sure that we have nothing to say to any one in your house that you would wish unsaid."

"You are a wise child, Janet, a prudent elder sister. You can't think how much I admire your right feeling and straightforwardness."

"Good night!" I said shortly, for I was in no mood to listen, even to praise from Lady Helen. I felt like a conspirator when Nesta, starting up from a pretended sleep, on my entrance into our room, threw her arms round my neck, and began to question me in frightened, shy whispers.

"Were we really going to-morrow? Had it not been a strange, long, weary day? Had I felt as she had done—as if something had come among us to make us all less happy than we were before? Had I noticed how unhappy Mr. Carr had looked all day, and how he had avoided speaking to us? Could it be that he had heard bad news, or could it be—Nesta did not think it could, and hoped I would not *think* she thought so—but could it possibly be that he was angry with us for going to the Moorsoms? It would be dreadful to make him angry! Would I mind telling her what I thought?"

She laid her soft cheek to mine, and in the darkness I felt that it was wet with tears.

I had been wishing all day that Nesta would open her heart to me, but now that the moment had come,

I dare not look in. I was too much afraid of seeing there what I did not wish to see—too anxious not to call out feelings, which my instinct told me would never waken into conscious life till they were put into words. I felt obliged to put back her confidence gently. It was true, I said, as indifferently as I could, that we were going to Deepdale the next day, but I did not think we had any reason to suppose that our going or staying was of sufficient consequence to Mr. Carr to make him angry about it. We had had an uncomfortable day, I admitted, but I hoped we should not have many more such; in a week or two we should go home again. We should have nothing further to do with the people here, and the time we had spent at Broadlands would look like a dream.

“Would it really?” Nesta asked. “Did I really think we could go back to our home-life, and find it just the same? It looked so far back! Yes,” she said, “it would be delightful to be with papa and mamma again. And yet—she hoped it was not very wicked—but the thought did not make her as happy as it ought. When she tried to fancy our all going home, and being just as we used to be, it made her heart sick. Was I shocked or angry?”

A little shocked, I am afraid I was, a little overfull of wonder and remonstrance. Nesta listened meekly to all I had to say, but her arms loosened their clasp of my neck, and her "good-night" kiss was not given with the happy consciousness of perfect sympathy with each other, that used to send us to sleep so peacefully in those old times of a month ago, which to me even began to look far back!

CHAPTER XVIII

„Ich dachte an ihn! — Es ist doch das Denken
Ein gar zu köstliches, süßes Gefühl!
Sich ganz in der schönen Erinnerung versenken,
Was geht wohl über dies heitere Spiel?“

KORNER.

NESTA and I spent the next morning in strolling about the garden and the wood. We might go where we liked without fear of disturbing any one, for Charlie and Mr. Carr had started early on a ride to the railway station to inquire about a parcel of books which Lady Helen wanted. A few lines left by Charlie on the hall table informed me of this fact. Squeezed into a corner of the paper was a postscript in a different hand—"Don't make any plans for the afternoon till we return." I overlooked the words on first glancing through the note. It was the sudden flush which came over

Nesta's face when I handed the paper to her that made me examine it again.

"We shall not be allowed to make plans now that Lady Helen is well enough to plan for us," I said, in reply to an anxious look Nesta turned on me; "we shall have no choice left us, you will find." I was right; for in the course of the morning Lady Helen came into our room shawled and bonneted. "She was very sorry," she said, "to seem to hurry us away, but if we could be ready she thought she would order the carriage to come round at once—while the day was fine she thought a drive would do her good—an hour or two later she might not be able to enjoy it."

Of course we could make no objection. We were ready when the carriage came to the door, and received warm thanks and praises from Lady Helen for our speed and punctuality.

So it fell out that our good-bye to Mr. Carr was waved from the carriage as he and Charlie passed us on the Deepdale road, at such a fast gallop that they could not stop their horses till we were out of hearing.

If an overpoweringly glad welcome can make up for a cold farewell, there was warmth enough in our

reception at Deepdale to put the coldness of Broadlands out of our minds. I confess it had a very soothing effect upon me. When Lady Helen had taken her departure, and we found ourselves surrounded with honest faces, beaming heartfelt satisfaction upon us, I felt more at ease than I had ever done since I left home. I wondered how Nesta, who must know that all this sunshine of kindness shone on her account, could keep her downcast looks unaltered.

There was nothing in all that passed that could embarrass her. She, indeed, received the warmest welcome, as being the first friend, but I was not without my share of distinction; and having every disposition to enjoy being made much of, I permitted myself to be pleased with a good grace.

Before dinner was over, by which time our host had entirely won my heart by asking if I were related to a clever young Mr. Scott, whom he had met at an agricultural meeting in the west country, I felt quite at home with every one, and, perhaps, permitted my new friends to perceive my satisfaction too plainly. What conduced chiefly to set me at ease was, that the one member of the family whose attention would have troubled us, was considerate enough

to keep in the back-ground. Lady Moorsom pitied Nesta, and prescribed globules for a headache which she pleaded in excuse for her silence and want of appetite; Miss Moorsom chattered to her, and praised everything about her, from the manner in which she plaited her hair to the open-worked hem of her handkerchief; Sir John explained to me the map of his estate, and repeated, word for word, a conversation he had had with Hilary on the relative merits of deep and shallow draining. Mr. Moorsom, meanwhile, ensconced himself in a dark corner of the room, with a very antiquated agricultural journal, and though his eyes certainly took long holiday-excursions from his book, he never did anything to remind us of his presence, except when his father directly called on him for information, or Miss Moorsom insisted on his leaving his retreat to be enchanted with Nesta's singing or wretched on account of her headache. When questioned by his father he answered as sensibly as Hilary himself might have done; and when his sister's appeals forced him to render Nesta some service, his hesitating manner seemed, I thought, to appeal to her good-nature to exonerate him from the charge of having any share in his sister's manoeuvres.

Lady Helen would have been enchanted with me if she had overheard my part in an argument into which Nesta and I fell when we were alone in our room that night. We talked long and eagerly, but it was very unlike one of our old home talks. In the middle of it I discovered that, for the first time in our lives, we were talking *at* each other; busying ourselves angrily with a question, which we only cared for because it represented a hidden feeling each saw in the other's heart, and dare not attack openly.

The ostensible subject of our quarrel was the comparative attractions of Broadlands and Deepdale. I praised our new abode, Nesta defended the one we had left; we grew quite hot and angry in support of our opinions, and said sharp things to each other; till at last, as Nesta was expressing her contempt for my preference of Lady Moorsom's trim garden to the untidy lawn at Broadlands, she broke down into an agony of tears—an agony which all my caresses could not for a long time soothe away. It was ridiculous, she acknowledged between her sobs, to cry because I did not agree with her in admiring a garden—too ridiculous—she did not understand what made her feel so—and yet—

Each time she reached the *yet* her tears broke out afresh, and, at last, seeing that I should never hear the end of the sentence, I persuaded her to leave off attempting to finish it, and allow me to help her to bed.

Daylight found Nesta terribly ashamed of her last night's fit of weeping, and very penitent for having caused me so much anxiety by her unaccountable sorrow. And as penitence with her always included a desire to atone for her offence, she really tried to set my mind at ease on her account, by struggling to overcome her fit of low spirits.

She met the anxious inquiries about her health, that assailed her on every side when she appeared at breakfast, with ready smiles, and cheerful assurances of being quite well, not the least tired, able to walk or ride, or do anything that anybody liked.

Lady Moorsom was made happy all breakfast-time by having to tell each person who entered the room, that "she had discovered the right medicine for Miss Ernestine's headache, on the first trial. Such a very bad headache as it had been ; so oppressed as dear Miss Ernestine had been with it, and it had yielded to a single globule ! It was gratifying to have such a patient.'

Mr. Moorsom was duly grateful to the globule, that had worked such wonders, but he could not refrain from putting in a word in favour of Deepdale air; he had never thought Broadlands a healthy place, and he could not help being glad that we had left it.

"How could Broadlands be healthy?" Sir John struck in—"lying, as it did, close to those undrained marsh lands? He had talked to Mr. Carr about draining those marsh lands," Sir John assured us, "till he was tired of talking; they were a disgrace to the whole country, and a perpetual eye-sore to him, who could never ride past them without thinking what they might be made, if they had been possessed by a landlord able and willing to lay out a few thousands judiciously in deep draining, the deeper the better, and more remunerative in the end, as your brother knows, and will tell you if you ask him, Miss Scott."

Sir John had now fairly mounted his hobby, and Lady Moorsom, seeing no present prospect of again bringing forward hers, hastened the conclusion of breakfast. When it was over, she carried Nesta away with her to make a tour of the house, and Sir John and Mr. Moorsom claimed my company in a walk to the home farm. I had on the previous night

displayed considerable knowledge on agricultural matters, drawn from my careful perusal of Hilary's letters, and Sir John was, he said, curious to see whether it would stand the test of an open-air examination.

"Many people could talk learnedly in a room," he informed me, as we set out together, "who proved themselves perfect ignoramuses when they were taken into the fields or the farm-yard."

"If I had been a young farmer wanting some of his land, instead of a young lady making myself very agreeable, he should have said I had too much of what he called book-knowledge. It was easy enough to have that; why, there was young Carr—I should hardly believe it, but he (Sir John), had heard him talk at county meetings, of science, and chemistry, and what not, till really one would think he was the most experienced agriculturist in the district. He talked, but when it came to doing—to draining his own waste lands, for example—(here Sir John stuck his walking-stick deep into the soil of a ploughed field we were crossing)—as for doing, he should just as soon expect to see that stick jump out of the hole, and walk to the gate, as Shafto Carr put any one of his theories into practice. Now (picking up

his walking-stick, and resuming his walk), now, I knew what he thought of Shafto Carr. Perhaps, however, I did not care to know.—Here we were at his great turnip-field, and I should be put to my first test.—Come now, were those common turnips or Swedes?”

Having never critically examined a turnip in my life, I pronounced wrongly, and gave Sir John the pleasure of having a hearty laugh at my ignorance, and a good story against book-learned people, to treasure up for future telling.

Mr. Moorsom insisted on my having another chance of redeeming my character, so we passed into other fields, and looked at fences, and pulled down the horns of self-satisfied cows, and I was subjected to other tests, from some of which I came off triumphant, and in others was put to signal shame.

At last Sir John remembered that I might be tired, and as his son had business at a distant farmhouse, we separated from him, and turned homewards, Sir John accommodating me by leaving the fields, and taking the straight road. As there was less to see here, we fell into more continuous talk, and I was rather dismayed to find, as we trudged on together, how very confidential it grew, and

how difficult it became to avoid understanding Sir John's hints.

"How old, now, did I suppose he was? Sixty-five, did I say?—no, no—no such thing! wrong by eight years. He should never see seventy again. There was no denying it, and he never tried to hide it from himself; he was getting into years. He should not stump about his fields for many more autumns as he was doing that day, but what of that? he had only one wish unfulfilled, and that was to see his son happily married and settled before he died. At the same time, he did not wish him to marry any one. He should like to see him well suited, and heartily in love, and then, if the lady was of a family he could approve, he should ask no further questions. It had never been the custom of the Moorsoms to marry for money. And by the way—talking of family—he did not think he had ever heard it clearly explained to him of whom ours consisted. Had I any brothers besides Hilary and Charlie?"

"No."

"That was as well, perhaps. And our father was a clergyman, *Professor* Scott, a monstrously learned man, no doubt." Sir John assured me that "he had a great respect for the Church; if he had had a

second son, and he had been clever—which, however, he would not have been—he had intended to have educated him to take orders. The living of Deepdale was in his gift, and there was no one in the family to take it. They used to say (joking, I understood); that his daughter Susan must marry a clergyman, to keep the living in the family; it did not seem likely to fall out so; perhaps something else was fated—one never knew.”

Thus, sometimes soliloquising to himself, sometimes questioning me, Sir John chatted on, till we reached a gate, opening into the flower garden. There, having business in the stable-yard, he left me, saying I should find Lady Moorsom in the garden, by this time busy among her rose-trees.

I congratulated myself on my escape, but I found before long that I had only changed one over-communicative companion for another. Fate seemed to have delivered me over for that day, a victim to private conferences. As I was trying to slip into the house by the drawing-room window, Lady Moorsom, looking a very strange figure, in her brown-holland garden dress and enormous hat, called to me to come and join her on the lawn. There she kept me till the bell rang for luncheon, while, marking

time with her garden scissors, she delivered a discourse, which sounded to me terribly like an intimation of her willingness to set herself vigorously to the task of fitting Nesta for the high responsibility to which Providence had been pleased most inscrutably to call her.

My cheeks grew very hot as the talk went on, but there was no point at which look or hint of mine could stop it. Indeed, it did not take long to see that Lady Moorsom was not a person to be lightly arrested in a discourse. She gave me to understand that she had been highly gratified by the insight into Nesta's character which she had obtained that morning; Nesta had shown herself thoroughly teachable, and that was the quality which Lady Moorsom most admired in a young girl.

She was disposed to believe, from what she had seen of us, that our mother must be a person whose ideas and principles remarkably corresponded with her own. That would be a gratifying circumstance to them both, when they came to see more of each other, by-and-by.

Nesta looked delicate, and delicate health was a drawback to any one, but Lady Moorsom hastened to assure me that she was not uneasy. When we went

home, which must not be till Nesta looked a great deal stronger than she did at present, Lady Moorsom was resolved to write to our mother full directions how to manage Nesta's health. Country air and homœopathic treatment were all that were needed to make her quite robust, and they *must* be secured to her as soon as possible.

I don't think my temper would have borne another sentence of such complete monopoly of care for Nesta. I was only saved from an outbreak by the opportune ringing of a bell, which summoned us to the house.

We spent the afternoon in the garden, watching Mr. and Miss Moorsom as they practised shooting at a target, in readiness for an annual archery fête which was to be held on Sir John's lawn. They were both excellent shots, and the interest they took in each other's successes, and the intense pride with which Sir John watched the performances of both, made the exhibition less wearisome to me than it would otherwise have been. After much entreaty, Nesta and I were prevailed upon to try our powers. I, of course, did nothing but hurt my fingers, and send my arrows right and left among the flower-beds; but Nesta, after some failures, succeeded once, when her bow had been very carefully adjusted by Mr. Moorsom,

in sending an arrow into the outer circle of the target. The triumph of the whole Moorsom family at this feat could hardly have been greater if the safety of the kingdom had depended on its performance.

I happened to be the last of the ladies to leave the lawn, and just as I was going, Mr. Moorsom, seized with the mania for confiding in me which had embittered my day, called me back, to tell me, in a hesitating voice, that "he *could not* tell me how much he had enjoyed the afternoon, or what a delight it was to him to see us in his father's house. He had hardly dared to hope for such happiness," &c. &c., till my perseveringly quick walking brought us breathless to the door. The evening passed without more *tête-à-têtes*, and I was not sorry, on going to bed, to reflect that one day of our Deepdale visit was over.

The next morning, in the course of conversation at breakfast, it came out that, long as we had been at Broadlands, neither Nesta nor I had visited the favourite resort of sight-seers in the neighbourhood, the ruined abbey and wishing-well at Walsingham. Miss Moorsom's indignation at Lady Helen's gross neglect in not having secured us such a pleasure was only silenced by the vehemence with which Sir John promised us, that we should not leave *his* house till

he had shown us everything worth seeing within twenty miles. Mr. Moorsom applauded this resolution very warmly, and suggested that in order not to lose time in carrying it out, we had better drive to Walsingham that morning. The plan pleased every one. We set off about eleven o'clock, Sir John, Miss Moorsom, Nesta, and I, in the open carriage, Mr. Moorsom riding on horseback by the side. It was a glorious September morning, fresh and bright. My spirits rose, and I determined to forget yesterday's perplexities, and give myself up to the enjoyment of the drive. Nesta was very quiet, but I think she felt the influence of the bright day as well as myself. The expression of weariness left her brow, and her lips once more relaxed into the happy dreamy smile I had so often seen them wear during our last week at Broadlands. Her thoughts might be far away from us. I suspected that they were, but no one asked for her thoughts ; to sit silent and look pleased was all that was required of her. Mr. Moorsom every now and then rode up to her side of the carriage to bring her a bunch of nuts, or a curious fern-leaf out of the hedge, or to tell her who lived in the house on the hill, or how long such a village church had been built. She always had a word of

thanks and a smile to give him in return for his information; she allowed her hands to be filled with his gifts, and he was perfectly satisfied—provokingly satisfied, I thought. His honest red face was one glow of delight all day long, while Sir John's head must have been tired of nodding knowingly at his daughter. There was happily so much for me to see, that I could avoid encountering looks of intelligence. My head was generally out of the carriage, now looking backwards at a man and two girls dibbling wheat in a ploughed field, now straining forwards to watch the flight of a covey of partridges Mr. Moorsom had started in trying to hook down a crimson bit of bryony from a hedge. My curiosity about the common country labours I saw going on around afforded continual amusement to Sir John, and caused him to thank his stars very heartily that he had not wasted any of his years in London. How he pitied me for never having seen turnips hoed in my life before, and for not knowing how beets were stored in a field for winter use. I, on my side, reflected on the difference between his and his son's way of looking at country sights, and Mr. Carr's. All three were sincere lovers of the same scenes—all felt their beauty more or less keenly—all were minute observers; and yet in what

a different spirit they looked—what different thoughts the same objects suggested. To one the earth was a curious hieroglyphic book, of which every letter deserved minute study for the chance of its yielding a key to the hidden meaning of the whole; to the other two it was a vast store-house, and they the guardians of a portion of its riches, responsible that no particle entrusted to them should be wasted.

We left the carriage at the little inn at Walsingham, and walked to the beautiful grounds where the two or three ivy-covered walls of the old abbey stand. I was a little disappointed to find only one perfect arch of the chapel-window remaining, and that I could not even trace the outline of the other parts of the building.

Sir John did not understand why we cared to know where monks who had been dead for more than three hundred years ate, and said their prayers. He could not but think that the smooth green lawn, where some of Sir Henry Walsingham's fine southdowns were feeding, was a pleasanter sight than old stones and tumble-down walls. Mr. Moorsom was sorely discomfited that he had not answers ready to all Nesta's questions, and Miss Moorsom appeared to feel aggrieved that I, who had never been to Wal-

singham before, should presume to know more about the foundation and destruction of its abbey than she did. It was so very odd, she thought, especially as they had a "History of Norfolk" in the library, and she perfectly remembered having often sat upon it when she was a child.

Happily, the business of unpacking the baskets and spreading their contents on the grass engaged our undivided attention before long, and interrupted a dispute between us respecting the credibility of Henry VIII.'s pilgrimage to Walsingham, which Miss Moorsom was sure could not have happened without her having heard of it.

By the time we had dined, Sir John was tired and quite ready to start on our road home again. While we visited the well, he would, he said, stroll slowly down to the village and order the servants to put the horses to, he hoped we would not be very long in following him.

The Wishing Well was at some distance from the abbey ruins, and when we reached it, at first sight it looked so much like any other well, that we hardly thought it worth the trouble of coming so far to see. It was not till I was shown a moss-covered stone marked with a cross and showing plainly the spot

where bended knees had worn its surface, that I could feel at all solemn. Then I had some satisfaction in reminding Nesta, that probably Henry VIII. and Anne Boleyn had stood where we were standing; and, conjuring up a vision of stately knights and fair damosels with cockle-shells in their hats, I knelt on the stone, took the cup of clear water which Mr. Moorsom handed to me, shut my eyes and wished vehemently—that I might some day write a book which should go through five editions and be reviewed in the *Quarterly*. When I rose, I had a great deal of banter to endure about the earnestness with which I had wished. What could I have wished for? Did I really believe it would do any good? I could not say, but I certainly did feel sufficiently elated at having succeeded in wishing the right wish at the right moment, not to be at all troubled by my companions' ridicule. Miss Moorsom had so far lost faith in the holy water as to be disinclined to try her fate again. Mr. Moorsom insisted on wishing after Nesta. He dipped the cup once more into the well, and held it up without rising from his knees. Nesta came near, looked down at the stone, and stood musing for some minutes with her eyes fixed on the cross. I, with

my antiquarian fancies still in my mind, could not help thinking that standing thus, she presented to us as pretty a picture as any wandering damosel of olden time ever gave her knight. She had taken off her bonnet, her soft brown hair hung rather lower on her neck than usual, the long drooping eye-lashes touched her cheeks, her lips met in a sweet grave smile, her hands were clasped behind her, and her light figure bent forward a little as she looked down into the well. And if devotion, too strong for words to utter, could transform Mr. Moorsom into a fit representative of an attendant knight, there was no denying that his up-turned face and almost reverent attitude expressed it as truly as the most exacting lady could require. For a second or two I had this picture to contemplate, then, just as I expected Nesta to kneel down, she drew a step backwards, and, with the colour rushing into her face, she begged Mr. Moorsom's pardon for having kept him waiting so long, but she had made up her mind not to wish. Mr. Moorsom threw the cup back into the well without reply; it span round and round in circles and then sank. Nesta and I stood looking at it rather blankly, and Mr. Moorsom sprang up and betook himself to knocking the dust from his knees. It was

a relief to us all when Miss Moorsom remarked that it was time we began our walk homewards, and set us the example by moving from the well. We had about half a mile to walk to the village. At first we were a very silent party, the few remarks I made not being followed up by my companions. After a time I perceived that Mr. Moorsom was instructing his sister to walk quickly on with me, and leave him and Nesta behind. She complied, giving me an audible hint that she was anxious for my company; but I resolutely stuck to Nesta's side, regulating my pace with hers so carefully, that no manœuvre of the other two could separate us. At last the village spire came in sight, and Mr. Moorsom, in despair, slackened his pace to a slow walk, and said, turning to Nesta.

“ May I ask you one question ? ”

Nesta looked to see if I was safe at her side, and then answered, “ Yes, certainly, as many as you like.”

“ I will only ask one—was it because *I* held the water for you, that you would not drink ? ”

Hitherto, he had been torturing his hands into every possible painful posture; as he spoke, he suddenly stood still, looking firmly—almost with an

air of dignity into Nesta's face—as he waited for her answer. She returned his look, a little surprised, but not embarrassed.

“No, indeed,” she said. “Why should I mind your holding the water? I believe I was not thinking of the water or of you just then.”

It was curious to see on Mr. Moorsom's face, how expressions of relief and mortification followed each other. He was silent for a minute and walked on again.

“Then,” he said in a voice not vexed, only a little hurt and very humble; “may I ask what prevented your drinking? Why did you change your mind?” Nesta once more looked up and smiled frankly.

“I don't mind telling you, because I think you will understand. It was looking at that cross that made me change my mind. I felt that if I knelt down, and if a real wish came into my heart, it would be a prayer; and I dare not wish.”

“But why not?” asked Mr. Moorsom, eagerly. “Are not all earnest wishes prayers? I meant to have wished. I, too, should have thought of the cross and of the hundreds of people who had knelt in faith upon it; and my wish should have been a prayer, the most earnest I ever breathed.”

The deep feeling with which these words were said did not startle Nesta. She was pre-occupied in following out the course of her own thoughts.

"It is not that I am afraid of praying," she went on; "or that I think it wrong to pray everywhere, about everything. I don't myself quite understand why just then I could not kneel down. If I had had a wish ready, as you say you had, I might have done so. It was because I had not planned what to wish, and I feared what might come."

"You could not have a wrong wish."

"Oh, I hope not. But one feels sometimes that it is so much happier not to wish. If any great good came, one had rather not have wished for it beforehand."

"It is like you to feel that; thank you for explaining your thought. No friend of yours would ever choose that you should have time to wish. You are a sort of person to whom every blessing ought to come as a surprise, before your mind has been troubled with a thought about it."

"Do you think so?" said Nesta, gently shaking her head. "Oh no! that would be very bad for me. I ought to have my share of trouble and disappointment, as well as anybody else. Why should not I?"

"I cannot tell you why—I can feel why."

The last sentence was spoken hesitatingly, and Nesta received it with a start of surprise, and a perplexed look at me. What had she been doing? She had allowed herself to be drawn from her fence-work of reserve, and she did not know how much of the new, strange feelings that were perplexing her own mind she had unwittingly betrayed to others. Her start and blush, and the nervous haste with which she began to make common-place remarks to me, were, I thought, an unfortunate end to a conversation in itself calculated to convey a mistaken impression. I felt that if Nesta had been quite the Nesta of old times—if there had been no disturbing thoughts in her heart, she would not have acted or spoken as she had done that day. Since this was clear to me, how could I expect it to escape the eyes of one who was watching her so closely, and who was sure to interpret every unusual sign of emotion according to his own wishes?

I was vexed, but I could hardly be very angry with Mr. Moorsom for looking gravely satisfied and happy during the rest of our walk—for getting into gay spirits during our drive home, or for telling his mother, at least twenty times during the evening, that our day at Walsingham had been the most

successful, the happiest he had ever had in his life.

After tea, the dusty volume containing the history of Norfolk was hunted up from the library, and while Sir John snored loudly in his chair, and Miss Moorsom nodded on the sofa, Mr. Moorsom seated himself between Nesta and me and read extracts in a low voice, pausing now and then to ask us a question, and when our answer was confirmed by a statement in the book, never failing to call on his mother to admire our extraordinary proficiency in English history. I had hoped that some note or message from Lady Helen, to fix the time for our return to Broadlands on Monday, would have arrived for us during the day. Nesta and I were both a little disconcerted when we found that none had come.

END OF VOL. I.



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